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## Sunken Cities

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE STRANGE STORY OF A LOST  
ISLAND OF THE PACIFIC

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THE disaster came suddenly. The sea was quite smooth. The air was thick and hot, and so windless that every sail hung slack. All weather conditions were fair. The only indication of anything unusual was the coppery mist that magnified the moon and turned it to orange.

I didn't see the first wave, for I was taking my trick below. Vampage said it was as high as Popocatepetl and traveling at the rate of a thousand miles an hour. Knowing Vampage for the precise scientist he is, one can gauge the moral effect of that wave on him.

Luckily we were practically bow on, and the schooner went up the watery slope of this marine Popocatepetl in a dizzy swoop. That was where I woke. Coming out of a dream in which I was climbing a wall like a human fly, I found myself shooting through the air. I landed on what I

thought was the floor, but it wasn't, as I found when I discovered my foot through the frame of one of Vampage's Inca drawings, which hung on the forward bulkhead, near the ceiling.

I did find the floor a minute later, for the schooner righted. She also began to jump and pitch like a mad horse. We were in the rough water at the top of the wave, and were getting hell.

On deck I saw the most nerve-destroying sight I have ever looked upon. The sea all about us was lashed to an incredible fury. It whirled and tossed into waves that looked like spouting mountains.

From the look of things we were in the heart of a tornado—only there wasn't any tornado. There was no wind. I think that unnerved me most—that terrible, tearing sea, which threatened to swamp us any moment, behaving as it did under a serene and windless sky.

As I rocked and slithered, and was kicked hither and thither by the great slaps of the sea, I crawled, drenched and holding on for life, toward Vampage at the wheel. He was holding on to that crazy wheel with the concentration of a giant; but he was able to gasp in no great voice, so still was the air:

"Earthquake—submarine upheaval—get sail off her, Warrene—wind presently!"

I clawed forward on the wild and bucking deck. I yelled for our three kanakas, but none came, so I let the mainsail down at a run. There wasn't so much risk, as there was no wind.

One of the men, Toao, came up then, and began to stow the big sail. His teeth were chattering, and he let me know why. The two other men had gone overboard.

Before I could get to the jib, wind hit us. It did the work for me. It blew the canvas right out of its bolt eyes, and for the moment I thought we were finished.

We heeled, and the sea seemed to flow right over us, unopposed. Then we kicked out of it into a night still serene, though I could see massed clouds hurling forward like armies of devils on the charge.

We ought to have been swamped out and drowned a score of times during the next two or three hours, but by a series of miracles we were not. I need not describe what happened to us during that time. Vampage and I clung to the wheel, trying to keep the schooner before the wind, and wondering when the end would come.

About three o'clock in the morning we thought it had. The fury of the waters, now no more distinguishable than pale gleams in the intense darkness, seemed to redouble until the whole world raved insanely. There came a series of crashes, bumps, whirlings, heavings, and poundings. I had the foolish impression that we were turned over and over like a pebble rolling along the floor. To this day I can't say whether that was what happened. I heard Vampage's voice bawling, close to my ear:

"Hit—something—surely?"

I knew instinctively that our mast and most of our rail had gone. I also knew instinctively that no other human being had ever gone through such an experience; and then, quite suddenly, things were almost deadly calm.

Not really deadly calm, for the wind still howled over us—but it *was* over us. We didn't understand it, but we seemed to have

been forced into a pocket of a dead calm, a little hole in the storm, with the tempest raging on every side of us.

The schooner was on even keel, and so steady that we seemed fixed on something—a sand bank, we thought. This was confirmed by the fact that, though strained and leaking, the water did not gain, but maintained a level that was actually below our water line.

It was too dark to see anything, and we were too much exhausted to care whether we were going to die or not. When we found that the storm no longer touched us, we simply flopped down on the deck and slept.

## II

THE hot glare of the sun woke both of us practically at the same time, and we opened our eyes to a world in full daylight. We saw that the reason why the sun hadn't waked us an hour earlier was that it had only just struck down on us from over a high cliff.

I was staring, amazed, at that unexpected high cliff wall, when Vampage cried in a tone of amazement:

"By Jove, it is the Wahine Rock!"

I turned and followed Vampage's eyes to the sky line, and there, sure enough, towered the profile of that lonely and little known ocean mountain top—the Wahine Rock.

I was quite as startled as Vampage. We had been sailing for the Wahine Rock. We wanted to study the megalithic remains there. We had a theory that we could connect up the great stone fortresses and gigantic heads on the isolated and uninhabited Wahine with finds we had made of ancient civilizations in a certain remote valley of the Andes.

My surprise, however, was not at finding that the curious tempest of the night had carried us safely to the very point we wanted to reach. It was a more astounding thing than that. It was that the Wahine Rock was no longer the Wahine Rock.

The Wahine, as I have indicated, is—or was—no more than the summit of a mountain thrusting itself above sea level, as the St. Paul's Rock in the Atlantic does. It was—I had better keep it to "was"—well outside of the trade routes. It had practically no vegetation, and was the most desolately isolated of all the Pacific islands.

In fact, nobody would dream of visiting



it save archaeologists like ourselves, who were interested in the few but remarkably well preserved ruins on the slopes of the rock. These ruins—forts constructed of huge slabs of stone, houses of the same nature, and colossal statues—have been half covered by the sea, indicating that in some previous age the Wahine Rock must have been of greater extent, and that it had been submerged in some natural disturbance of the sea bed.

And there lay the reason of our astonishment. The Wahine Rock was no longer the Wahine Rock. It was an island of fair size. That which had once been sunk by some great convulsion had emerged from the sea, thanks to the earthquake that had done its best to wreck us.

We were lying in a deep estuary between high cliffs, on one side, and on the other a beach and slopes leading up to the crest which we both knew—since we had visited the place—to be the old top of the Wahine. We could also see weeds and deep water incrustations leading up to the old water line, which was now nearly a mile above us.

The seaward end of our estuary was blocked by a bar of slimy shingle, which every wave submerged. We must have been flung right over that bar by the great waves—luckily, for the bar broke the force of the breakers and left us in smooth water. We could see that the schooner itself rested on a bank of shingle that curved up out of unimaginable depths.

"Jove!" cried Vampage. "There's no doubt about it! What an earthquake buried under the sea, an earthquake has restored." He stared up to where the old stone houses and platforms cut the sky. "And, Warene," he said in a shaking voice, "I believe that that accident is going to give us the greatest find in the annals of archaeology!"

"Meaning exactly?"

"Look!" he whispered, and his fingers sketched the outline of the great prehistoric structures. "They continue under water, as every reputable expert thought. Those few remains on the old Wahine are but the topmost buildings, and there are others down the slope. Look at the massing of them! Why, my boy, there are thousands of buildings—a veritable city!"

His excitement had got hold of me now. He was right in saying that there was no doubt about it. Massing all the way up the slope from the beach, greened by sea

slime, but, on the whole, curiously free from marine growth, were the buildings of what must have once been a large city.

We could make out, even from that distance, the unmistakable solid bulk of the great block stone houses and platforms, built, it seemed, by giants, who cut their huge stones so cunningly that the walls held firm for ages, though cement was never used. I could see, on great platforms, rows of huge images, some nearly forty feet high, some with the round crowns worn by similar images on Easter Island. The entire mass of houses and platforms and images was built up the mountainside in a way made familiar to us by the Inca remains in Peru and Chile. There was no doubt that a prehistoric city had come to light.

A marvelous find for us! Fragmentary remains of a splendid unknown race, or races, are found all over the Pacific from Easter Island to the Carolines; but they are only fragments, giving mere hints of a departed people whose secret is lost. Here, before our eyes, was a complete city.

"And if it was as suddenly engulfed as it was vomited up again into daylight," Vampage said, "then we ought to find in those houses priceless memoirs of human existence—implements, vessels, ornaments, furniture, perhaps, many traces of a vanished civilization. I say!"

He took a step forward, and peered.

"Did you see something, too?" I said breathlessly.

"What do you think *you* saw?" Vampage asked me.

"It's absurd," I said, shamefaced. "I thought I saw something *walking*!"

He frowned.

"Then I'm absurd, too," he muttered.

"That's what I thought I saw."

"Up there by that platform of images?"

"No—down there by that building that looks like a temple."

"Somebody walking?"

"Yes, upright."

We stared at each other. How could anything that walked upright be on that uninhabited rock only just emerged from the depths of the sea?

"No good being fanciful," I said, with a forced laugh. "We're not the only people who could be wrecked here."

"No," he replied. "No, that is an explanation; but—but it was bare skin, I thought."

"And very white skin—very."

"Yes," he said. "Might be natives from a wrecked canoe."

"Might," I said; "only we're well in the belt of the dark Melanesians. I didn't think—it didn't strike me as a human being who'd lost—lost its clothes, either."

"Ah! You boggle at the sex, too!"

"The hair, I thought, was long and—and, well, I couldn't help thinking that the figure was womanly."

"We're letting our nerves trick us," he said decisively. "It could be nothing but survivors from a wreck. If so, we'd better give them a hail."

We both shouted at the top of our lungs. Our voices rang like thunder against the cliff, boomed and echoed up through the massy stone walls of the once sunken city. We paused, breathless, with hammering hearts, and listened.

There arose a most extraordinary sound—a weird sound. It was a frightened, thin wailing. It rose and fell shrilly, musically, as if tangled with its own echoes. It was a queer, pitiable, flutelike, birdlike sound.

"Birds!" said Vampage, in the voice of a man glad to set his fears at rest. "Look!"

A host of birds rose up from one quarter of the island. They flew screaming upward, with a thousand white flashes of wings.

"Gulls, mostly—but there are vultures there," I cried. "What the deuce are they doing here?"

"Feeding on the dead fish that couldn't escape when the island was heaved up out of the sea," replied Vampage.

"Do vultures feed on fish?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said slowly, completely puzzled; "but obviously they made that sound."

He said that, I know, because he wanted to convince himself; but he failed. I wasn't convinced, either. It might have been a bird noise, of course, only—only there had been something creepily human in that wailing.

"Anyhow, there's been no answering shout," he went on doggedly. "What is more, I haven't seen any more—walking. Have you?"

"Not a sign. The place seems dead."

"It is dead," he said resolutely. "We've been nerve-shaken fools, Warrene. The flash of a bird wing, or the play of the sunlight on a flapping weed, has deceived us."

I said nothing. Perhaps it was better

to think we had been deceived. All the same, I wasn't.

"Anyhow, we'd better get ashore to look around," Vampage suggested.

"How?" I asked. "Our only boat is smashed, and we haven't enough broken bits to build a raft."

"We'll swim, naturally."

I looked into the deep, black waters of the estuary that yesterday must have been the best part of a mile under the surface.

"Of course we'll swim," I said. "We can't miss looking at that town—only, well, I'm just wondering exactly what sort of sea monsters lurk down there!"

"None, I hope," he answered with a shudder. "If there had been any, we should have seen them floating dead on the water. The change from the deep sea to the surface would probably have killed them. At the same time, we can't take risks."

### III

WE took as few risks as possible. Leaving Toao to deal with the leaks in the hull of the schooner—surprisingly few, thank goodness—we went ashore. We used a grating lashed to a couple of empty boxes as a sort of raft. Vampage stood on it with his automatic in his left hand and a boat hook in his right. His business was to watch for the rise of sea monsters. I swam and pushed the raft along. I did this not because I was braver, but because I am a good swimmer.

We had, I suppose, about two hundred and thirty yards to go. We had covered two-thirds of the distance when I heard Vampage gasp. I looked up, and saw him staring over my shoulder into the sea, with the most extraordinary look on his face. It wasn't terror. It was a look of astonishment, bewilderment, and fascination combined. He peered into the water with enthralled eyes, not attempting to defend me against anything.

I stopped kicking, and floated.

"What is it?" I cried.

As I spoke, something touched me. It touched the calf of my leg, and ran over it with a gentle pressure, as if to feel it. It passed to the duck trousers I was wearing, tucked above the knee. It tugged gently at them, as if to appraise their texture. It slid up, fingering my belt, and then my silk shirt.

It was uncanny, that touch, but not

alarming. It was as if the small hand of a curious child or girl was trying to discover what I was made of. It was a touch as gentle and as delicate as a caress. I wasn't afraid; but suddenly this thing, this hand, took a firm hold of my shirt and began to tug me downward.

I shouted and kicked. Vampage became galvanized into life. He leaned over and beat on the water with the flat of the boat hook. I noticed that he beat the surface only, striking nowhere near where the thing that held me must be.

The thing left in a flurry. I could feel the water swirl about me as it went rapidly; and I, too, went rapidly, pushing Vampage on his platform through the water at the best speed I knew.

Panting on the slimy beach, I stared at Vampage, whose face was a most curious study.

"What was it?" I demanded.

He could only stare at me with bewildered eyes.

"What was it?" I demanded again.

"I wonder if I've gone mad!" he said thickly.

"You've not," I said; "and one way to keep sane is to tell me what it was."

His answer was staggering.

"Do you believe in the mermaid myth, Warenne?" was what he said.

I sat up, dumfounded. Was he mad, after all? I asked myself that, and somehow I wasn't sure of the answer. After all, that was what the touch had felt like—a girl's hand.

"That was what I saw—or thought I saw," he said, more or less incoherently. "A girl rising through the water—hair floating out like a dark cloud—white shoulders—very white breasts—white arms touching you—hands—"

"A fish tail?" I cried, half scoffing, half serious.

"Legs," he said. "I saw calves, and small feet, very slender, very white. Oh, you're laughing at me, Warenne; and perhaps you're right. Perhaps I am mad; only that's what I thought I saw."

"That's what I thought I felt," I said soberly enough.

I explained my sensations of something plucking at me with a human hand.

No, we couldn't answer the riddle then and there; yet somehow, though the thing was impossible, we had to take it seriously. Vampage had seen. I had felt.

"There was something queer about the neck and throat," said Vampage, elaborating his vague description; "something that looked like fish gills. The flesh seemed curiously transparent, with a beautiful pearly transparency. I thought I saw others, too, in the depths, hovering, as if not so daring as this—this girl. There were pale, pointed faces and dark eyes looking up—white, dim shapes and clouds of hair floating."

We turned it over and over, getting no farther.

"We can't answer that problem by sitting down over it. We may by exploring. Come on!" I said, at last.

I put on thick boots and buckled on the pistol and the big cutting knife that had been carried on the raft, and we made our way up to the city.

The first group of houses we came to told us that we had made a find indeed. They were the authentic dwellings of an ancient and extinct civilization. It was, however, impossible to examine or enter them. They were choked with sea undergrowth, shell and coral incrustations, and the like. We might have been discouraged, had it not been evident that higher up the mountainside the structures were freer.

We went up through a whole belt of the ancient buildings. Then we came to a break, and crossed what must have been, at one time, a sea beach. Above this we went through another belt of houses and platforms, which was less overgrown than the first. The entrances of the houses were still choked, but the seaweeds and corals were more recent, and not so thick.

Out of this belt, again, we mounted what must have been not so much a beach but a harbor basin. The vast mortised walls that edged it had obviously been quays and dockside structures. Indeed, Vampage pointed to some short upright pillars, which might have been used as bollards for the tying up of ships, or of the great war canoes of the past.

Again we were in a belt of houses partly choked with the weeds and accumulations of years under the sea, but again definitely clearer and less deeply grown. Again we walked through this to what must have once been a beach, fronting a fourth group of houses. It was when we came to this that Vampage stopped and cried out:

"I have it! Do you see what happened, Warenne? This island was swallowed

gradually. There were four definite subsidences. Why, it is written as plainly as if it were set down in words. Look there! They built on that cliff across the estuary, too."

I looked across the estuary, which, at this height, could be seen opening out into a big bay beyond the schooner. There the layers of houses and beaches were as plainly marked in degrees of age as on a comparative map.

"The lowest city, naturally, was the first to go under water, when something happened in the vast subterranean unknown, and the earth crust holding up this portion of the globe settled down. How many centuries ago that happened, Heaven alone knows. It might have been thousands of years before the first kings of ancient Egypt were ruling. The people of that lower town who escaped, or who had fled to the upper heights at the first rumble of the earthquake, built the next town against the next beach, just above the new water level. How long that new city, that new race, that new civilization lasted we can't say, but in time that, too, was swallowed, as the mountain on which it was built settled once more. Again the survivors built a new city, which stood for centuries, perhaps; but again the mountain sank deeper, and again the city was drowned. Then they built this last city, which is before us, Warrene—their final holding place. They lived there—how long? Then, and not many hundred years ago, from the look of it, their island sank again. All was buried under the sea, save the few ruins on the mountain top that we knew as the Wahine Rock; and with that final submergence the people and their civilization vanished utterly."

"Are you sure?" I asked.

He looked sharply at me.

"Perhaps their civilization has left its history to be read by us, Warrene," he said.

"I was thinking," said I, "of the people themselves."

He gasped a little, and shuddered.

"Better not," he said. "That way madmen lies."

I knew what he meant by that. He meant we must ignore the things we thought we had seen—and felt.

#### IV

WE turned and entered the last city of the drowned civilization. From what was

obviously a harbor basin, set with marvelous quays built of great stone blocks, we mounted, by magnificent broad steps, to the town.

The quays were splendidly spacious, with floors that must once have been as true as a ballroom. The bollards were unmistakable now, and Vampage pointed out ring-bolts let into the stone surface. He hacked at one with his knife until barnacles, slime, and metal came away.

"Looks like a bronze alloy," he said. "Very like that Inca stuff we found among those hidden people."

I thrilled. We had spent eight months in a remote valley of the Andes, among a people never discovered since the days of the Spaniards. We had seen buildings, ideographic script, implements, weapons, religious and social ceremonies. We had studied a language which seemed to us to give the key to the secret of an ancient civilization that must have spread all over the Pacific from Peru to the Java Sea—and even beyond, through Africa and India, back to the civilizations of the Mediterranean, perhaps.

Then we had sailed out to find other remains that could be coördinated with our discoveries; and here, by mighty accident, we had perhaps stumbled on the archaeological treasure house that would tell us everything. Although I am not going into details, they being scientific and dry, I will say that at every step we seemed to see things that confirmed our theory.

The quay was guarded by a gigantic inner wall. We passed through it, under a heavy pylon gate of the type that seems to link the monuments of ancient Egypt with those of prehistoric Mexico and Peru. We walked along high-walled, windowless streets of massive stone houses—streets that might equally well have been those of Cuzo or Thebes in very early times.

We went into a small temple tomb, and saw a seated effigy that might have been an ancient Inca or a Ptolemy. The walls were covered with incised picture writing, and there were little guardian gods about, some with bird or animal heads. The writing, I will admit, showed distinct traces of the Melanesian bird cult, but the wall backing of the statue was Inca—a great metal sun, of solid gold, as the point of Vampage's knife showed. A wonderful find, the key to an age-old mystery!

In the houses, we discovered no furni-



ture, but many trinkets and vessels, vases in human shape or animal form, the little statuettes of fused mercury and gold that only the Incas had the secret of working, and writings in ideographic script. I cannot go into the details here.

What soon impressed itself on us most deeply, however, was not a matter of archaeology. Even on the quay we had noticed it. In the little temple itself, Vampage spoke of it.

"The place is much too clean!" he cried.

"I've been waiting for you to say that," I replied. "It has been worrying me. There's no marine growth at all—no seaweed, very few barnacles, no coral at all. Apart from this slight green slime, the place is well preserved."

"Too well preserved," said Vampage. "It's been under the sea for many years, to human knowledge. It may have been submerged for centuries. It ought to have a growth over it as thick as on the bottom of a lagoon; whereas—"

"Whereas," I said slowly and evenly, "it looks as if it had been carefully swept, weeded, and scoured—carefully tended."

"Carefully tended—at the bottom of the sea! My dear fellow, don't be a madman! Who could have—"

He stopped, gasped, stared at me. He knew what I meant.

"We mustn't think of it," he groaned. "Come on—we'll explore."

But we didn't really explore. When we reached what must have been the great central square of the city, all thought of exploration was swept away.

As we stepped into this vast place, amid cyclopean walls, the birds rose up. A host, ten thousand screaming birds, filled the air. They were gulls, mostly, but there were several vultures. The vultures worried me a little.

"Dead fish," said Vampage, in a voice which he tried to keep steady. "See them all round by the wall? This square acted like a great trawl as the island lifted out of the sea. No way of getting out save through those four gates, and the rush of the escaping water drove the fish against the stonework and killed them. The gulls are having the catch of their existence!"

"The vultures," I said shakily, "rose from that corner over there."

Vampage threw a quick look at me, and went pale. Perhaps I did, too. We both felt that we were on the verge of abnormal

discoveries. Nevertheless, we went straight across the square to the corner that I had indicated.

And there we saw the people.

There were four of them—two men, a boy, and a young girl. They were all dead. They, too, had been flung against the stonework by the force of the departing water, and killed. I heard Vampage's breath coming quickly as we looked down at those pitiable figures, and I knew he was recognizing the creatures he had seen under the water when that shy, curious hand had touched me.

They were slender people, as nude as any savages; but we knew that that was so not because they were savages, but because their habitual element demanded freedom from clothing. The only vestige of garment, if one could call it such, was a belt. In one man and the boy, it was a thing of twisted seaweed. The other man had a belt of metal strips and links, beautifully enameled. We had seen the brother of that belt among the Andean valleys.

The woman's belt was more what one would expect from her sex. From it, after the fashion of a short kilt, were suspended brightly colored streamers of seaweed.

The use of the belts—even the boy's and woman's—was obvious, for each carried a short, daggerlike sword. One of these was of obsidian, two were of some sort of flinty coral. The man with the metal belt carried a weapon of metal alloy. All the weapons were constructed for stabbing. Under water, of course, a cutting stroke is almost impossible.

The bodies before us were short and finelimbbed, but their chests were abnormally large, with the breadth one finds among mountain people and others who have to make the most of an inadequate atmosphere. All four had good features. We recognized them as the features of that hidden race among whom we had lived in the Andes. The nose was high-bridged, the forehead broad, the cheek structure slightly Asiatic.

On the other hand, the mouth was curiously copious and loose, as if accustomed to folding tightly, to shut out some dangerous element. The nostrils, distended now, had a strange rubbery look, as if built to contract to nothing as well as to expand at will. The eyes, slightly protuberant, though not unattractive, had the curious look that one ascribes to a fish.

The skin was very white indeed—blanched, in fact; yet for all that it had a transparency which, in the girl, reached a lovely pearly luster. The girl, indeed, was quite beautiful. Small-boned and slender, with a luxuriant head of hair, she had the appearance of those delicate and exquisite elfin women that Arthur Rackham, the English artist, draws.

Undeniably these were human beings, and yet—

Vampage bent to the nearest male, and spread out the man's toes, which were very long. The webbing between them was as pronounced as a sea bird's. So, too, was the webbing between the fingers. Some South Sea tribes, which live half their days in the water, have this webbing—grown through the course of generations of habit—but none have it in so marked a degree as these people whom we saw on the Wahine Rock.

And there was another thing. Vampage pointed to the man's throat. I saw the strange structure which he had declared the mermaid had had in her throat—gills—the gills of a fish.

Undeniably these were human beings, but human beings modified, through the course of centuries, to live in an alien element—to live in the water, like fishes.

We didn't speak as we stared down at those mermen. We didn't dare. A thousand questions and demands for explanation thronged our minds, but we dare not voice them, for wonder, horror, and distress held us.

"These are not myths," said Vampage, in a hollow voice. "They died only a few hours ago, in that terrible upheaval!"

"That means they were living in this city—living as citizens in a submarine world. By Jove, that is the reason why these buildings are so well kept, why they are free from weed-growths, and are scoured!"

"It's madness!" cried Vampage. "We daren't think of it. It's against nature!"

"The mermaids you saw coming from the depths to me are still living as these people lived yesterday," I persisted.

"Madness!" groaned Vampage. "Here, let's get on and see if we can find the answer to the riddle before our brains crack!"

## V

We went on to the summit, and to those gigantic remains which were once the only

things that stood above the sea level. We saw now that this last and highest group of ruins was part of the outskirts of the city we were in.

One huge structure we had particularly desired to examine. We had meant to cut or blast away some of the great stones, for on our previous visit we had seen that it was impossible to get into it from the land side. We quickened our steps to it, for we perceived that the falling away of the sea revealed great doors leading into it from the vast platform on which it stood.

As we went forward, Vampage stopped. He pointed to a curiously worn hollow in the rock where the old water line had been.

"What do you make of that, Wrenne?" he asked.

"So you've noticed those places, too!" I said. "I've already decided what they are. Did you observe that two of them had roughly hacked steps? Yes? Well, then, I guess you'll agree with me that those hollows are landing places. The people climbed upon dry land there. From the look of it, they did so regularly and often."

"Yes," he said. "Undoubtedly that is what it means; and yet we saw no signs of such people when we were here last, and I've never met anybody who did."

"No," I said. "They hid, of course; but the fact seems obvious that they did—perhaps had to—come out on dry land at times."

"Like seals," said Vampage.

"Like seals, only they have those gills, and can stay under water longer than seals."

By this time we had reached the great platform. We entered one of the big doors in the vast stone structure, more than half of which had stood above the sea on our previous visit. We had brought torches for just this type of exploration, but we needed them less than we anticipated.

Climbing a smooth ramp, we came out on a wide floor that must have shelved out of the sea until it was above the water level. From a hundred natural or cunningly contrived crevices in the massive walls and roof towering above us, the sun shot down intensely golden beams. The place was swimming with a soft, gold-dusty light.

At first we were confused by the dusk. As our eyes became accustomed to it, our wonder overwhelmed us. Vampage put the reason of it into words.

"Good Heavens!" he muttered. "It's like one of the great community huts of the South Seas. Look at those divisions, and the things hanging in them—women's skirts of colored seaweed—images, utensils. There's a rack of those swords hanging up. Over there is undoubtedly a couch of seaweed. By Jove, this was the community house. They came in here for the night—couldn't sleep under water, I suppose. The sea is only half their home, and this was used for the other half of life."

"Not *was*," I said softly. "It *is*. They are in here now. Can't you feel them? Can't you hear them?"

The feeling of many presences was unmistakable. I had the sense of scores of eyes looking at me from the gloom. These mermaid people were gathered in the darkness, watching us.

Vampage felt it, too, I could see. Both of us heard it—the rustlings, the queer, sibilant noises. Our eyes turned instinctively to a dark bay in the vast building. Vampage's arm shot out, and he flashed the light of his powerful torch into the gloom.

The immediate result was flurry and panic. We heard the scared bird wailings that had startled us back on the schooner. We heard scufflings and the rush of bodies. We saw white forms and flowing hair scuttling across and out of the bright rays of the torch. Yes, the sea people were there and alive—and humanly frightened!

Vampage called in a level voice to reassure them, and made a step forward. Immediately one of the stone knives came flying through the air—very badly thrown, but its intent obvious. Vampage switched off his torch, and we retreated toward the nearest door.

"Better get out of this!" he said. "We've disturbed and frightened them. They may attack us, and we don't want to shoot them. Better get out, and let them get used to us and our good intentions gradually."

We backed out, down the ramp, to the platform outside in the sunlight; and there the accident happened.

Twenty of these strange amphibians had run out of the community house and upon the platform. In the sunlight, their courage had come back. Most of them being women and girls, their curiosity had got the better of them. They stood, a delicate, lovely, and fairylike group, looking anxiously and eagerly at the doorway through

which they expected us to emerge. They stood, beautifully poised in their slender grace, ready to run, yet eager to see.

They did not realize that we had come out of another door until we were very close to them. Then their panic was profound. They turned and scuttled like so many startled pixies across the great platform. I have never seen a more beautiful sight, as their slender limbs twinkled and their pearly skins shone in the sun, while their long hair floated behind them, shining like lovely sea wrack.

Then, with a shrill cry, one frail girl stumbled over an unevenness in the platform, staggered, and fell. She lay still, stunned, and the rest vanished.

We ran up to the poor, delicate thing. In my arms she seemed, indeed, as insubstantial as a fairy. I never saw so delicate, so pointed and piquant, a little face. The beauty of it thrilled me. She had suffered a heavy blow on the temple, and lay cold in my arms.

I forced just a drop or two from my brandy flask between her teeth—sharp, pointed little teeth. Her soft little shoulders shuddered, and she opened her eyes. She looked into my eyes for a minute, and then shrank away from me in fear, fighting to escape.

I smiled at her and let her go. I said over and over again the ancient word, the token of friendship, which we had learned in the mountains of Peru.

She seemed to understand either my word or my smile. She hesitated; then panic came over her again. She wriggled upright from my knee and tried to run.

I let her have her own way absolutely, making no effort to hold her; but she was too dizzy to go far, and there was a gash on her shin that must be paining her. After three strides she sank down again, hiding her face in her arms.

We did nothing at all, but simply left her alone. In a minute her shoulders stopped shuddering. She even stole a look at us. We sat squatting, smiling at her.

In another half minute she turned her full face to us. Though she was trembling, both curiosity and reassurance were getting the better of her. Crouching, supporting herself by one slender arm, she faced us while she examined us steadily. I uttered the word of friendship again, and held up bare hands—the simplest gesture of peaceful intentions.

She sat up. She was conquering herself, or her curiosity was. She gave a half smile—a lovely, pixy smile. Then she grew afraid again, and dragged her stone stabbing sword from her girdle.

We smiled again. We lifted our own big cutting knives, and carefully put them down on the platform, away from us.

Then she really did smile. With a delicious little gesture she put her weapon away, and allowed us to approach.

We made motions to show that we wanted to attend to her injured leg, and I took out the first-aid packet we always carried. After some hesitation, she stretched out the leg, and I took it into my hand.

She watched, frightened but interested, while I gently washed the wound with water from my bottle. She giggled when I dusted boracic powder upon the cut. She was in raptures when I put a patch of gold-beater's skin over the wound, and bound the slender, delicate limb with an anklet of soft lint. It was a new trinket for her.

Her courage had come back completely. Her elfin smile came perpetually. Her thin, fine fingers played over my hands, pinching them gently, to see if they were real flesh.

My clothes amazed her. Tugging at my shirt, and finding it wasn't tight skin, she gave bird laughs of wonder. The bright, slightly futuristic silk handkerchief in the breast pocket of my shirt filled her with amazement. When I gave it to her, she was in a transport of delight. She suddenly flung her arm around my neck, with the abandoned gesture of a child, and gave me a little hug. Then, springing to her feet, she turned and waved the handkerchief, like a flag, at the others.

There must have been two score of the sea people on the platform by this time, half of them men. The women kept at a timid distance, and hid as much as possible. The men stood a good way off, with their queer swords in their hands, hesitating between flight and attack. The gestures of the girl we had succored reassured them a little, but still they would not come near.

The girl limped toward them, calling to them as she went. This was our first proof that they had a spoken language. She used distinct words, and though we did not understand, we felt that some of them, at least, had root sounds very like the language we had studied among the hidden people of the Andes.

Still the others would not come forward, and the girl, smiling at us, looked back and forward, at a loss. We merely smiled and waved our hands to her, and left her to her companions.

It was no good hurrying things, we knew. We must allow the girl to tell the others that we were friendly and harmless, and leave them alone ourselves until they had become accustomed to the idea of us.

We thought we had plenty of time in front of us—months, probably, of the most wonderful study and discovery.

## VI

ONE happening, at least, on the way down to the schooner warned us that we might be wrong.

We were on the beach between the second and third of the once submerged cities, when the world began to tremble under our feet. It was a sharp and horrible sensation. The motion threw us flat. We heard the birdlike screaming of the amphibians around us, and knew that they, too, were terror-stricken. And no wonder. For the space of a minute and a half the very earth swayed and rocked, buckled and heaved—and then was quite still again.

"Another shock!" said Vampage, as we climbed to our feet. "I don't think we are finished with these earthquakes yet. It seems to me that before we start thinking about studying these ruins, we'd better satisfy ourselves that the schooner is still seaworthy."

"You don't mean you think the island may sink under the sea again, Vampage?"

"I hope not, for the discoveries we are to make; but it did so before, and may do it again, and it would be wise for us to make sure that we ourselves possess something capable of floating."

That was the first untoward thing that happened to us as we hurried down to the sea. The second was physically still more fearsome, though perhaps less momentous.

We had gained the lowest of the belts of houses—the city that must have been submerged to a depth of nearly a mile before the earthquake heaved the island above the sea again. Making our way through a wilderness of branching coral and massed and decaying marine growths, we saw something stir in a pool of water and slime. We stopped and looked—and a monster crab rose and attacked us.

The mere sight of him made me sick



with horror. He was a loathsome brute. His legs were tall and spidery, like stilts, and they lifted him at least four feet from the ground. His blotched white body was enormous. His big fixed eyes stared straight into mine with cold voracity.

He came with a jump and a sharp, scuttling run that was groggy, but full of the beastliest intention. His enormous nippers poked out at me, and the froth of hungry desire bubbled out of his mouth. I was helpless with a nauseating fright.

Vampage killed the brute with a single upward stroke of his big cutting knife. The knife, in fact, went clean through its body, with such ease and force that it fell to pieces.

"A deep sea crab," said Vampage, as we examined the monster. "No armor, and as soft as pulp. It was probably dying, from the change from deep sea pressure to air. He'd be an ugly customer in his own element, though."

"Yes," I said, "and it seems to me that there may be other and still uglier creatures flung up by that earthquake. We'd be wise to have the rifle with the exploding bullets ready for action."

## VII

WHEN we reached the seashore, we found that, slight though the earthquake tremor had been, it had wrought astonishing changes. The first knowledge of this came from the fact that a strong sea was pounding and whirling up the estuary, which told us that the shingle bar that had protected it had sunk. It was evident that in that tremor the island must have subsided at least five feet.

We were naturally anxious for the schooner, but we soon found that Toao had been quite adequate to meet the situation. Floated off the shingle bed by the dropping of the land, he had allowed the drive of the incoming sea to carry him up the inlet, where, choosing his moment, he had made the impetus carry him around a long range of old buildings stretching out into the estuary like a breakwater. He had been carried right across the smooth water here, and had grounded the schooner on a smooth, sandy flat.

He was up to his waist in water, when we arrived, examining the hull of the schooner for leaks. He had already cut away the tangle of ropes that bound the broken mast to the vessel.

He was a very calm Polynesian, Toao, and he told us that with a very little patching the schooner would be quite seaworthy. And in fact we found this out while we worked on the hull, as we did nearly all that afternoon.

Toao was quite undisturbed by fear of earthquakes or death, but the sight of the amphibians filled him with superstitious terror. He told us that they had been swimming about the ship ever since we left it. They had climbed out on the rocks, or floated, face and shoulders showing, as if they sought to allure him. He had been so much afraid that he had been on the point of barricading himself in a cabin, when the earthquake tremor had frightened all of them away.

"Why were you afraid of them?" we asked.

"But of course, lords," he answered. "Did they not want to drag me down to death? That is what they always do."

"You know all about these people, then?" said I.

"Certainly! This is the place whence come the Women of the Beaches. That is why it is called the Wahine Rock—the Woman's Rock. All through the islands they are known. Have you not heard the story? There are certain bays with lovely beaches, which these women haunt."

"They can't haunt," said Vampage, grinning. "They're human—flesh and blood. Only spirits can haunt."

"Whatever they are," insisted Toao, not at all shaken, "they are not as people of this world. They haunt these beaches, waiting for men. If men go upon the beaches, then they show themselves, and, because they are beautiful, the men love them; but when the men go into their arms, they are dragged under the waters and are gone forever."

"We know that fairy tale," I said, smiling; "but I don't think it has anything to do with the people here."

"This is called the Wahine Rock for no other reason," declared Toao. "They have been seen here by men of our race."

So these amphibians had been seen on the Wahine before, by natives! All the same, we were not at all inclined to think that these people had anything to do with the familiar South Sea legend of the Women of the Beaches.

"There are men among the people here, too, Toao," Vampage told him.

"Of course," he admitted. "They are those they have pulled under the sea."

"But they are all white," I argued, "not dark, like the people of the islands, and they have high bones in their noses, like ours."

"It is the sea that changes them," said Toao, unconsciously quoting Shakespeare.

Toao held to his definite opinion, but we could not agree with him. Why should we? His theory was fantastic, while we knew that we were facing decisive facts.

Here before us, in these four submerged cities, was evidence of a civilization going back for very many centuries—perhaps for uncountable centuries. The people we had seen showed the strain not of the Polynesian or even of the older negroid type, but of a rarer, whiter race. They were, in fact, akin to the very high type that we had found in the hidden Andean valleys, and we were convinced that they were the remnant of a tremendous and highly cultured people who had dominated the greater portion of the two Americas, and probably the whole Pacific belt also.

"I'm thrilled, Warne," said Vampage. "I really do believe we are on the verge of the greatest historical discovery of the age. I feel that if not from these amphibian people themselves, then certainly from their ruins, we shall solve the riddle that has so greatly puzzled every archaeologist who has studied the question of extinct American civilizations."

"I confess," I smiled, "I am thinking, at present, more of the people themselves."

"She was certainly a very lovely little thing," he answered slyly.

"Very lovely," I said, blushing; "and, because she is so lovely, she helps me to concentrate on the human and personal side of the matter. Why is she amphibian? What condition of things forced her and her kind into a physical shape in which she can, and perhaps must of necessity, live in two elements—water as well as air?"

"Perhaps you have answered that yourself, Warne," he said. "Necessity did it. I've been thinking on those lines this afternoon, and I believe it is the only answer. Besides, everything conspires to that end. Take, first, the four submerged cities. The four—or there may even have been more—separate catastrophes that gradually drowned what may have been a thickly populated island kingdom, must have assured the people of their ultimate doom.

The disasters probably happened at long intervals—indeed, they must have done so; but nevertheless, the race that was gradually forced up the mountainside by successive submergences must have seen that there would come a day when the island would be completely, or almost completely, engulfed. They were a cultured, a brilliant, and perhaps, in their way, a scientific race. Let us agree that their history taught them what, logically, would be the end of their island home. They knew, that is, that a final earthquake would sink their kingdom—or most of it—under the sea. They prepared themselves to survive such an end."

"The best preparation, Vampage, would be to take ship and search out a more stable island or mainland," I jeered.

"We think so," he said. "Did they? I think not. Indeed, facts prove not. They did not take ship and go away, for they are still here. Possibly they had arrived at the conclusion that the whole world was to disappear under the seas. The subsidence of other islands, maybe, made them feel that. We can see for ourselves that they must have prepared themselves to survive in a world that was merely water—and apparently they succeeded."

"But, my dear Vampage," I cried, "do you mean to tell me you think that ordinary, normal people deliberately trained themselves to be half fish, half human?"

"Deliberately, or by force of circumstances, they have become half fish, half men, haven't they?"

"But you're talking about a physical impossibility!"

"Am I? Surely not. Don't we know half a dozen tribes between here and the Australian coast which, from constant swimming and traffic with the sea, have developed a definite webbing on their feet and hands? These people only carry that webbing a stage further."

"That doesn't explain their gills. We don't know any tribe with gills like fishes, do we?"

"We do know, though, that quite a number of children are born with gills, Warne. Indeed, it's not so very strange, for it is an established fact that the rudimentary organs of the fish exist in all of us. Is it inconceivable, then, that constant training to live an underwater life might have redeveloped those gills which all men have? It may have come about through the evolution of centuries—"

"It would take a good many centuries!" I scoffed.

"Would it?" he grinned. "What about the latest scientific warning as to women turning themselves into four-toed animals, owing to the use of cramped shoes? Shoes are not so many centuries old, and yet we can already see the female little toe shortening itself toward the point when it will vanish altogether. Why, then, couldn't these people redevelop their fish gills under deadly need, by great effort, and even, perhaps, by some surgical treatment we don't understand? In any case, have you another explanation that fits? Here are definitely human creatures, with characteristics that you and I recognize as belonging to one of the oldest races on the earth's surface. They are human beings, and yet half fishes. How did they get their dual nature? What other plausible theory can you offer?"

"They may always have been like that."

"That is a theory quite as fantastic as mine, Warenne," he returned; "and I don't think it holds good. Did you observe those great carven images? Did you notice the image we saw in the temple?"

"Not closely," I admitted.

"If you had, you might not have used that argument. Not a single statue showed signs of gills, rudimentary or otherwise. The gods of their system, then, handed down, as they were, from past ages, were like other dwellers on the earth. They had no gills. Why? Because the men who first carved these gods hadn't gills, and reproduced the human form as they saw it."

I was silent. The argument seemed final. Vampage summed up.

"It seems almost a miracle, but I cannot conceive of it being anything but a fact. As these people saw the earth, as it were, disappearing stage by stage under the ocean, they trained themselves—made, perhaps, a religious rite of it—to live most of their lives in the water, and so save themselves from extinction. They succeeded, too—not quite, perhaps, for that community house up there seems to prove that they must spend some time on the earth, in their ancient element, the air. They probably have to sleep above water; and if they are sick, no doubt they must go ashore."

### VIII

We were at dinner, and we sat in the growing dusk, thinking of the strange life

of these amphibians on the island. We sat there until the sun was almost down.

Suddenly we were aroused by an outcry from Toao, on the deck. We rushed up, only just evading the Polynesian's charge as he ran to cover. On deck we realized why he had bolted. The ship was surrounded by women—the siren women, Toao thought.

It was really a wonderful and beautiful sight—and amazingly fantastic, too, if you like. The schooner, now properly calked, lay out about a cable from land; and all around us were the women—scores of them, old and young, mature and as slender and girlish as dryads.

They paddled gently, keeping themselves perfectly upright, their milk-white shoulders and breasts and their pearly arms lying on the shining water. About them and behind, their hair floated gloriously, weed-like but magical. Their pointed, elfin faces were turned to us, and their little pale mouths were smiling in fairy fashion. Their eyes looked shadowy and shining.

All about us women with milk-white shoulders looking at us, laughing at us with little bird laughs, raising slender, lovely, eerie arms that seemed to draw us!

"By Jove!" I said with a beating heart, looking on that ring of delicate and uncanny loveliness. "It does look as if Toao was right. They seem like siren women enticing us into the deep!"

Vampage's voice came unnaturally cold—I suppose he saw the effect on me.

"Don't be an ass, Warenne. They've merely come to pay their respects and proclaim their gratitude. Observe their votive offerings."

I saw that they had brought us presents. Along the side of the ship lay an amazing array. There were brilliantly scaled fish—veritable rainbows—in soft nests of wondrous seaweeds. There were shining pearly shells, branches of prismatic coral, strange stones that glittered, fine woven fish nets of seaweed, eating fish in piles, shells that were like horns, a score of wonders. They had brought their best offerings to us, the things that seemed to them the crown of beauty and utility.

"I believe they think we're gods!" I cried in an excited voice, drinking in the smiles of the women all around.

"Let 'em," said Vampage harshly, "as long as they don't find out we're far too human."

I laughed jeeringly, but I knew he was right. There was something about these frail and fragile things that seemed to intoxicate me with a dangerous fairy allure.

One swam close, calling to me in her birdlike voice; and she was most delicate and beautiful. I leaned toward her. Vampage put his hand on my arm.

"It's all right," I said. "It's the little girl we helped this morning. Isn't she a dear? I say, isn't it etiquette to return presents? We'd better open up one of those cases of trinkets we brought for trade."

"I think *you'd* better do it," said Vampage grimly.

"Perhaps you're right," I laughed unsteadily. "I'm beginning to understand why Ulysses tied himself to the mast when he was in the neighborhood of ladies like these."

When I came back with the trade goods, Vampage, scientific old stick that he was, was squatting as near to the water as he could, with three women floating quite close. He was patiently trying them out with simple, primary words of the dialect we had learned up in the valleys of the Andes.

"I believe we're right, Warenne!" he cried with excitement. Fancy being excited about a dialect when three lovely faces, with lovely shoulders to match, were floating a foot away! "I'm sure these are the same people. Their inflection is shriller, stressed differently, and there are deviations in accent and meaning, but there is undoubtedly a common root. Listen!"

But there was to be no listening. The exquisite sea creatures had caught sight of the articles I carried in my hands, and they raised such a twittering and bird calling, such a laughing and cooing, that the solemn subject of language roots was swept right away. Even Vampage had to join in distributing bead necklaces and armlets, bits of brightly colored cloth, and the two dozen other gaudy things of our line of trade.

The moon was up before we were through with it and all the women had swum off, twittering, with their loot—that is, all save one. She remained looking up at me, slender, exquisite, lovely, her little hand grasping a broken bit of rail, her body half out of the water, so that she could see me the better. She was the girl I had aided.

I stood looking down at the sheer white

beauty of her as the moon shone down over her. Pointed face, lovely and alluring; hair as dark as night, making a tent over the pearl of shoulders and breast; dark, mysterious eyes shining out of shadows up to mine. I was thrilled, intoxicated. I couldn't tear myself away.

She put up a hand, and I caught it. It was cold, but soft and thrilling. It pressed mine, it pulled gently, gently. My blood pounded, and I half yielded, moving toward the side of the schooner.

Vampage's hand caught me tight at the elbow, and his voice said harshly:

"Don't be a fool, Warenne! *You haven't gills.*"

I came to myself. I bent down, kissed the tiny hand, laughed, and waved adieu. Then I went pointedly down below, even as Toao had.

## IX

I CAME up again presently, and sat quietly in the night.

Yes, they went ashore to sleep. I saw white forms moving in the moonlight, white forms stretched out in sleep. I saw on a near-by rock, sitting like an exquisite statue, watching me, a white form. I thought I heard singing—singing gentle, soft, bird-like, singing that might be wind in the rigging, singing that seemed to have a call, a deep sea call.

I wondered if here was the secret of all the legends of the sirens. Was this, perhaps, the remnants of a race that existed and was known in the days when myth was made? Did the ancients know them to be sirens, and real? Was there a truer explanation of their existence than Vampage's theory?

They called—they seemed to pull at my heartstrings, bidding me plunge into the sea to get to them. Their beauty, their singing bird notes, seemed to overpower my will. I stood up.

Vampage heard me. He came up solidly, told me that it was impossible to sleep below, and sat lolling against the stump of the mast. He dissipated all myth and mystery with his powerful presence, and with his even more powerful tobacco.

## X

THERE were other things to disturb us that night. We had another earthquake shock. It was short and sharp. There were amazing crashings and bangings—the



noises of earth splitting and heaving. We seemed to be lifted up and dropped a terrific distance, then whirled hither and thither.

For half an hour we were in utter chaos, and I felt that our last hour had come. Then, quite amazingly, we settled, gently rocking, on the bosom of a calm sea. It was amazing, because, with the shock, a storm had developed again, and we could hear an ocean inferno raging elsewhere; but we were untroubled. We rode calmly, not even feeling the wind greatly.

We saw why when we awoke the next morning. The earthquake had done terrible things to the Wahine Rock. The great cliff which I described previously as being between us and the open sea had either crumbled away or been engulfed again. Only a low, rocky, splintered surface lifted between us and the angry ocean. It more than kept the breakers from us—it had locked us in. Part of it had fallen across the mouth of the estuary, and we were now on a lake completely landlocked.

That meant a great danger for us, I'll admit, but we spent less time in considering it, just then, than in examining the effects of the shock on the Wahine Rock. It was ghastly to look at that. Nearly half of the island had been swallowed once more by the sea, two of the cities had vanished again, and the water was covering most of the houses of the third. Of the amphibians themselves we saw not a sign. They had either taken shelter higher up the mountain, or gone under water, where they would be safe from the storm.

Our own desires, as a matter of fact, made demands on us. We saw that if we were not lucky, the greatest historical find of the age would be snatched from us. Any time now there might come another shock that would drown the last city, with its marvelously scoured and preserved remains. That was the idea which obsessed us, even to the exclusion of our own danger and the fate of the strange amphibian people.

We went below to eat a hasty breakfast, ordering Toao to do his best to move the schooner in toward the now distant mountain slope. When we came on deck, we were close in against the colossal walls of the third town, with the waves of our lake beating gently against them. I was standing by to cast a rope to the housetops at the water's edge, and Vampage was taking the tiller, when something happened.

First, like a flight of flying fish, there came shooting right out of the depths a score of white forms. They came leaping and darting to the surface; they wheeled and flashed and scattered like fish fleeing from some cannibal enemy. It was a moment before we realized that we were watching the amphibians flying for their lives.

Their shoulders flashed white out of the water, their long hair streaming, and they hurled themselves upon the land. More and more of them came darting upward and landward. Once ashore, they all ran for their lives. In a trice the sea and the foreshore must have been peopled by some two hundred darting and panic-stricken things.

Then, with a heave and a monstrous bulge, the water of the lake was disturbed. A wave seemed to burst its way up from the very depth of the sea, sending great ripples all over the inlet, and rocking the schooner. Vampage sprang forward and threw the anchor over to the nearest building, with his eyes on the water.

The sea heaved and boiled, and from the bowels of the world a vast white back heaved into sight. It seemed long, rounded, wrinkled, and shining, like the back of a great elephant; but there was a vile, sickly whiteness about it that filled the throat with disgust. There was a smell, too—a foul, musty smell of immemorial slime.

The disgusting white mass heaved itself out of the water. I saw an immense, long, beastly, pulpy bladder of a body, with arms that lashed the water in a mad fury.

Vampage swore, and backed hurriedly toward the companion.

"What is it?" I howled. "What the devil is it?"

"A squid!" he shouted back. "A deep sea octopus! The earthquake kicked it from the bottom to its wrong level. Heaven help us if that monster ever gets a feeler on us! I'm off for the rifle and the explosive bullets."

I stood rooted to the deck with horror. I have seen squids before. I hate them even when they are of ordinary size; but this was gigantic. Perhaps I am exaggerating, but it seemed to me to be bigger than an elephant. It was fabulous. I've never seen anything to approach it. There are no squids of that monstrous and repulsive size in ordinary waters.

This had grown and bloated in the dim, dark caverns at the bottom of the sea. It had lurked there evilly, under the pressure of deep water. Only the force of an earthquake, perhaps, could have heaved the brute to the top.

I watched it lashing out in fury, churning the lake with its mighty feelers. The amphibian people darted hither and thither, in the water and out of it, to escape. I thought they would all get away, but one, coming toward us, stumbled amid the growth on a housetop.

With a dart like a great spider, the monster flung himself sheer across the water. His long arms rushed into the air, uncoiling like flung ropes. Most of them missed, but one didn't. A tentacle snapped and gripped around a leg—a leg that had a lint bandage on it. The girl screamed and fell, clutching at growths of weed to hold herself against the deadly pull.

The squid, finding her resistance, pulled itself toward her. It slid over the water with evil effortlessness. Other tentacles curled out, gripping solidly here and there. It settled back to pull. I could see its devil face, its cold, immobile eyes, its sack-like and horrid mouth.

It pulled, and the girl slipped, screaming. She stabbed at the sucker that held her with her absurd stone dagger. She dropped the dagger, to clutch at the weeds with both hands again. Her eyes were fixed on me—on me!

The brute monster was pulling inexorably, sure of its prey. I was paralyzed by the horror of it all. Vampage was standing at my side now, cool, steady. He sighted his rifle at the thick of the body, so as to have all the flabby mass in the line of the bullet. He fired.

The mountainside above us rang and roared with the explosion, and with the crash of the bullet detonating inside the squid. I saw fragments of the pulpy flesh fly, but it was like shooting into a jelly, for all the effect it had.

The noise of the explosion nearly did the mischief. The girl screamed in fright, and all the others screamed at the clamor of the rifle and its echoes. She let go, and the monster pulled.

Vampage's second shot rang out, and his third. Each went home and burst, shattering the flaccid mass. The brute was lashing the water with its long arms, but one tentacle held, dragging at the girl.

A fourth shot! I jumped upon the nearest point of land—the roof of the great house the girl was on—and ran, scrambling over the weeds, toward her. She was giving in. The strain of that terrible pull was too much. She had yielded hopelessly, and was being dragged along to that horrible maw. Her slender arms were locked across her eyes.

I slashed with my knife at the tentacle that held her leg. Three savage cuts, and still it was holding on and pulling. The huge, fetid body was hideously close, making me sick.

I slashed again. Another feeler shot uncurling through the air toward me, hissing past my face, missing me by an inch only.

A fifth and a sixth explosive bullet sank into the very substance of that loathsome brute and tore it to pieces. My last slash severed the feeler, but I'll admit that the deadly steadiness of Vampage's shooting did as much to save the girl as my efforts.

The octopus, seemingly, was preparing to turn and fight its more deadly foe. It slid off into deep water as its feeler parted, darted away, turned, and seemed to stand at bay, its suckers lashing and churning the water into mad foam. Still Vampage fired and fired, and the great pulpy carcass was blown into fragments before our eyes.

At the tenth shot, the brute seemed to realize from which direction its death was coming. With a gigantic effort it hurled its huge, torn mass right out of the water toward the schooner. I held my breath. If the octopus reached the schooner, or even got its tentacles upon the rail, it might drag the vessel down into the depths.

Vampage fired again. With admirable coolness he shot straight at the horny mass about the mouth, and the bullet exploded there with shattering effect. A cloud of ink burst from the brute, and the water was clouded for yards; but when it cleared the squid had gone, sunk right out of sight.

## XI

I got the girl to the schooner. She was in a dead faint, and it took us some time to bring her around. At first none of her companions would come near, for the sound of the firing had frightened them almost out of their lives; but, as they saw that we were treating the rescued girl gently, they gradually began to come close.

Soon the girl was able to sit up. She waved assurance to them, and they came

stealing over the half submerged house-tops toward us, gathering about the schooner. Vampage had pushed the vessel off a little way.

"If they come crowding aboard," he explained, "they're likely to sink us."

There were, all told, between two and three hundred of the amphibians. All of them, males and females, were between the ages of infancy and, I should say, thirty-five. We had begun to think that no member of this strange race ever reached the age of forty, when a group of oldish men, surrounding one even older, came through the crowd to the edge of the nearest housetop.

The oldest man wore a diadem of beautiful enamel and gold work, and carried a clublike scepter that made Vampage open his eyes with pleasure. There was reason. That peculiar crown, and the scepter, were the traditional badges of royalty in that ancient valley of the Andes that I have so often mentioned.

"The aged king," Vampage muttered to me, "and his court of priests, wise men, and advisers—and not one of them over fifty! This race is obviously at the end of its run, and we have come just in time."

These old men, in their forties, were wrinkled and shrunk like ancients. They carried all the marks of a degenerating strain. They walked as near to the schooner as possible, while all the other amphibian folk drew back, so that not even the kingly shadow should touch them—a taboo as ancient as the islands.

Since these rulers wanted to speak with us, Vampage ordered Toao to pull the schooner close inshore by the warp.

"We'll have audience with his majesty, Warrene," he said, smiling with anticipation. "A great chance for us! He or some of his courtiers may be scholars. The priests, perhaps, may be full of historic lore. We may have a unique opportunity for learning things!"

"I'll leave that side to you, for the present," I replied. "I'm more inclined to take a few private lessons in their language. I seem to have a unique opportunity for that, too!"

I glanced down at the girl we had rescued. She was sitting in an attitude of half terrified wonder, looking at my watch in her hand. Vampage grinned.

"You're a frivolous devil, Warrene," he said. "Always ready to let exact science

slide, if there's a chance of a little philanthropy! However, I don't know that you're altogether wrong this time. Flirtation is the oldest method of language study."

He was right enough there. I had the happiest day with the dainty and delightful girl. She was really lovely—half fairy, half mermaid, strangely abnormal, and yet human enough. She was full of bird twitterings and raptures as I showed her over the schooner.

Fire frightened her a little, and the smoke of my pipe awed her. I gave her a biscuit, and she thought it was an amulet, until I bit a piece myself. Timidly she followed my example, and then spat it out, in disgust. Its sweetness revolted the taste of a creature of the salt water.

Our clothes and the fact that our fingers and toes—I was barefoot—were not webbed, and that we hadn't gills, were things to marvel over constantly. She would not believe that I could not dive under the water, and remain under as long as she could. She was unmistakably grieved at my refusal to dive overboard with her and explore the underwater world. She thought I did not like her well enough.

But I didn't indulge *that* folly. If I got into the deeps with her, she would probably hold me down until I came to the death which Toao insisted was the inevitable end of all who coquetted with such sirens. Her superior swimming powers would master me, and she would hold me under quite innocently, not recognizing that I was differently constructed.

I therefore remained resolutely on deck and above water. In spite of her seductions, I spent a really happy day—the happy day one would spend with a queer but adorable girl, who was as unaffected and playful as a child.

Of course, there were strange moments. To find that every now and then she began to pant in the heat, and only recovered after diving into the sea, and disappearing from sight for ten or even twenty minutes, was disturbing. To watch her swimming languidly ten feet under water, and turning on her back and blowing a playful stream of bubbles at me; or to see her suddenly dart like a flash and catch a fish, and hold it and let it go—or, as she did on one occasion, come back to the schooner with it and calmly eat it—all this was curious indeed.

It was a bizarre, extravagant, and yet



strangely beautiful experience. After a delightful day in the company of that delicate and dainty creature, I can well understand how it is that the myth of the mermaid has always had an alluring and lovely fascination for the race of earth-bound men. Strange, isn't it, that it is always sea maidens, mermaids, never air maids, that call to us? Well, I understand now why that is. This exquisite little creature put a spell on me.

## XII

BESIDES, my time wasn't all spent unprofitably. When Vampage returned, I had a notebook vocabulary of phonetic words, taken down as the girl spoke them, which was far ahead of anything he had managed.

"Made a good beginning," he said of himself; "but it was very tiring, and not too pleasant."

"I saw that being the guest of kings and prelates wasn't going to be as pleasant as staying at home," I told him, with a grin. "There was method in my frivolity. What did they do to you?"

"First thing they took me into a big, dark building up in the top town, sat me on a sort of altar, and wailed at me."

"Good Lord! They were making a god of you," I gasped.

"Something like that," he said sourly. "I was uncomfortable, and the proceedings were tedious. It was too dark to make out anything clearly. They don't need light, those—those fishes! They can see in the dark. And I dared not do anything, for fear of scaring them. Then we all went along to that big community house—to the king's chamber in it, I take it. There I was supposed to enjoy a sumptuous banquet. Ugh! It was really a trifle too revolting!"

"I know. Maura—that's the name of the girl, as far as she pronounces it—gave me an exhibition of the local appetite. It is simple but disturbing, eh? You just catch your fish, and eat it then and there. Made me shudder to see those sharp white teeth of hers at work!"

"There was that, of course. All the fish was raw, but there were trimmings, too—queer-looking sea fungus and weeds, horrible jellyfish, sea slugs, and so on. I might have stood up to them cooked; but to bolt them just as nature made them, and some of them alive—ugh! It'll take me

a long time to get over it. If I wasn't famished now, I couldn't bear the sight of food!"

It grew very hot and still and sultry as we examined my vocabularies on deck after dinner. Vampage scowled every now and then at the sullen, coppery sky.

"I hope it will give us our chance, after all."

"Hope what will?" I asked, seizing the opportunity to roll a napkin ring along the deck to Maura, who was sitting where our rail had broken down, her feet paddling the water.

"This darned earth disturbance," Vampage growled. "I don't think we're done with these earthquakes, but I do hope that the next will keep off until we have finished our work."

"I hope so, too," I agreed, watching Maura's transports of delight as she handled the shining ring of filigree silver. "I doubt whether we could develop gills as rapidly and as effectively as these amphibians did!"

But Vampage, being a scientist, had no time to think of his own safety.

"We're on the verge of an epoch-making discovery, Warrene," he said. "There is no doubt about that. This vocabulary of yours proves it. It's a first-rate day's work!"

"Oh, a little frivolous humanity is a good servant to science," I grinned.

"Yes," he said, so seriously that I wanted to shout with laughter. "That vocabulary of yours has made the first step in a stupendous discovery, I verily believe. You can see for yourself that it has a definite affinity with the dialect we picked up in Peru. Certain things are called by practically the same word, if we allow for the slight difference in accent. That links up with the things we saw in the upper town here—the script writing, the wall paintings, the images, the vases."

"And the features of the people themselves," I said softly, as I looked at Maura.

"Yes—the features of the people themselves, too. By Jove, it all fits in, Warrene! I'll swear they are the same race. I'll swear that we have hit upon the first people, the earliest civilization, of the Western Hemisphere. Think of it, Warrene! We have unearthed the secret of a great cultured race that dominated, perhaps, from the Peruvian mountains to New Zealand—an empire that ruled all the scat-



tered islands. Perhaps they weren't scattered islands then, but large tracts of land, or even one vast continent. Who knows what these earthquakes may have done with physical geography?"

"In any case," I said dryly, "it is not the duty of a true scientist to weave fairy tales about it. We must still consider them as having always been islands, unless we find differently."

"And we will!" he cried enthusiastically. "Don't you see that, Warenne? The whole history of this unknown and fabled race is ours to read. We've found our Rosetta stone, only it happens to be alive, human, and vocal. Those vocabularies of yours, the additional ones we will collect and perfect through conversations with these people, the translations of the wall writings they will give us—why, Warenne, we shall be able to read the hidden history of half the universe! The Easter Island ideographs will no longer puzzle us, as they have puzzled all the archaeologists until now. We'll translate the unreadable carvings of Yucatan. Do you understand, Warenne? We've found a new world, a new history. We are on the verge of gigantic discoveries that may rewrite the entire story of the universe!"

"Yes," I agree. "It's a big thing—mighty big."

"It's the biggest thing of our time," he bellowed; "and it's ours, if those confounded earthquakes will only keep off."

I didn't answer that. I was looking at Maura. She was standing up, and her dryad breast was panting. She looked at me with frightened eyes, and then gazed wildly away across the water. We heard a strange sound—the wailing of fear and woe, the cries of frightened birds.

Maura made a step as if to dive. Then she hesitated, and flung out hands inviting me—a beautiful, heart-rending gesture. Oh, I wanted to go to her, but I knew it meant death, and I shook my head.

She cried out to me a poignant, appealing, warning sentence. The few words I could make out in it seemed to be "hungry monster," "dwells," "bowels of the ocean." She wanted me to flee from the anger of that monster to safety. I knew I could not escape as she wished me to, and I shook my head.

The wailing, the calling from the amphibian people, rose insistent, demanding. She gave one agonized look at me, uttered

a despairing cry, hid her face in her slender arms, and vanished over the side.

Vampage and I stared at each other.

"She said," I muttered huskily, "something about the monster who dwells in the bowels of the ocean."

"The earthquake, of course," Vampage interrupted. "They know—they feel it coming. Better batten everything down, and be ready to cut the warp."

### XIII

THE earthquake came less than an hour later.

I don't think I need to describe it. I know I don't want to describe it, because of what it was, because of what it meant.

It was worse than the upheaval that had uncovered the sunken cities of the dead world. We were tossed through a night and a day in a hell of water, with a great wind trying to blow us under. We ought to have been killed. I don't know why we weren't, and I don't know how we weren't.

Exactly what happened is a mystery. All I know is that as the earth split and gaped, and engulfed the land that was known as the Wahine Rock, we were somehow caught and tossed out of immediate danger by the raging sea that poured across the vanishing land.

Why we didn't shatter against some rock, some projecting portion of the solid old houses, I don't know. I sometimes think we were too insignificant to be destroyed. We simply floated like a microscopic chip on the raging flood. We were whirled and tossed in every direction, but we floated.

Three days later we were still floating, but not quite so well. In fact, the seams had opened again, and the schooner was gaining water at a pace that made our pumping, agonized work though it was, look useless.

However, things were different. Whereas for two days we had been upon a starkly empty ocean, now we were wondering whether the tramp steaming toward us would reach us first, or the schooner sink first. Needless to say, since you are reading this plain narrative, the tramp won.

The steamer had caught the edge of the earthquake disturbance, but the skipper could tell us nothing. He thought it to have been just an ordinary storm.

As he was making for the Chile coast, we had to wait in what patience we could. It

wasn't a first-class patience. My notebook with the vocabulary had been reduced to pulp in the storm, and Vampage was nearly out of his wits at finding that the greatest discovery of the age, which had been ours to grasp, had been snatched away.

Perhaps I felt with him, but I don't know. I feel that my own anxiety was a personal one. It was not the loss of a dead history, but of a living entity, that filled me with anxiety.

I needn't draw out the agony. We discovered, as every one who reads newspapers knows, that the earthquakes had been the worst ever known in that region, and that the Peruvian and Chilean coast had suffered horribly, and also the islands far out in the Pacific. We sat quaking as the press gave us daily information of shore lines changed and communities wiped out.

Then came the news we had expected and feared—just a short paragraph, a report from a ship surveying the damage of the earthquake. That paragraph ended our hopes. It told us about the Wahine Rock.

It told us that there was now no Wahine Rock.

The Wahine had vanished entirely. The last terrestrial foothold of that unknown race had at last sunk beneath the sea. It was gone. It was wiped out. No longer would it be entered on charts, even as a reef.

Vampage is inconsolable. It left him broken to have that wonderful chance of a lifetime, that tremendous contribution to history and archæology, wiped out at a single sweep.

I am inconsolable, too—not because of that dead history, but because of a living girl.

Maura! I wonder about her. Was she killed? Was her race exterminated? Or do she and her people skim the undersea levels, slender, beautiful, mystic, keeping alive in the minds of frightened men the mystery and the terror of the legend of the Sirens?

I wonder if Maura still haunts South Sea beaches looking for me. If I only knew, I know where I would go.

THE END

### WHEN SPRING COMES BACK

THE brook is choked with yellow leaves,  
Acorns and rifled chestnut burrs;  
Summer is gathered up in sheaves,  
Another year joins the old years.

So short a time ago the spring  
Came laughing through the April rain,  
The credulous heart did naught but sing,  
And painted hopes sailed by again.

Ah, what a year it was to be  
Of purpose ripening in the sun!  
And what a year of love, said we;  
And now the year is almost done.

Little is ours of it to spend—  
Some sapless days of glory left,  
The heart so shadowed by the end,  
It hath no joy in what is left.

Yea, naught remains but as before  
To dream, the waiting winter through,  
That, when the spring comes back once more,  
Next year—ah, next!—but what of you?

Richard Leigh

# The Tainted Woman

A STORY OF MODERN LIFE IN THE INTERNATIONAL PLAYGROUND OF THE RIVIERA

By Vance Thompson

Author of "The Man of the Miracle," "Eat and Grow Thin," etc.

**O**PPPOSITE the railway station in Mentone, Torpichen saw the lights of a café, and pulled up his motor car. He took a seat at a table outside the café and ordered a bottle of Vichy. His throat was parched with the thirst born of anger.

"Confound the fellow!" he said.

There was no one at the iron tables on the terrace. The waiter who served him had gone away. His chauffeur was waiting patiently in the car. It was of what had happened in Monte Carlo, half an hour before, that Torpichen was thinking, with anger that had not quite burned itself out.

It was not what he had lost or won. He was fairly indifferent to money excitement of that sort. Of course he played now and again, because on the Riviera one does play now and again, for no particular reason, good or bad; but gaming did not interest him very much.

What he was thinking about was the row—the vulgar row—that had been forced upon him by an exasperated gamester outside the Casino. The fellow looked like a gentleman, too. He was well dressed, and spoke good French, but there was a Slavic snarl in his pronunciation of it—the Russian snarl. Doubtless he had been losing at the tables, and merely wanted to work off his ill humor on the first man he met.

"But why on me?" Torpichen asked himself.

It was a foolish brawl. When the fellow thrust into him, and spat out several oaths in place of an apology, Torpichen, with quick anger, caught him by the shoulder and hurled him back on the lawn. He could still see the handsome, savage face as it reeled backward in the glare of the

electric light—the fierce eyes and the bared teeth.

That was all. The fellow got slowly to his feet, but made no motion of attack or retreat. He merely stood there—then bent and picked up his hat. With a laugh, Torpichen turned away. Already a crowd was gathering. Easily enough the brawl might grow into a scandal; and that would hardly be pleasant, he thought, with Betty Demdyke coming.

He picked up his motor car in front of the hotel. Fortunately it was waiting, and Marwick had everything in readiness. Torpichen had meant to motor back to San Remo that night, in any case. A little earlier, a little later, what did it matter?

By this time the Vichy had cooled his throat and drowned his anger. He was in a mood to laugh at himself, as he rapped on the table to summon the waiter to pay his score.

But the waiter did not appear.

Instead, a dingy figure lurched toward him from the shadows of the road. At first he could hardly define it. Then he made out that it was a man, all hair and rags, hugging under one arm a shapeless canvas bundle. He was a tall man, in spite of his drooping shoulders. His ragged clothes had once been khaki-colored. Long hair, of almost the same shade, fell on his neck and straggled out from under his cap. A thick, unkempt beard covered half his face. An abject creature, and yet somehow, as he stood there in his dirty helplessness, he was not without a touch of pathos.

Torpichen knew the type. They are scattered all over Europe, these wastrels washed out of Russia by revolution and famine. Everywhere they wander, without

courage, without future—with only fading memories of the mocking glories of past days.

The man and the bundle! In the bundle would be a wad of greasy papers in unreadable languages, stamped with meaningless *visas* of vanished nations, more rags, pieces of string, and perhaps a hunk of stale bread—the common viaticum of unending vagabondage.

Torpichen spoke first. He was touched with pity for this broken man, and, although his words were flippant, there was kindness in his voice.

"You are a mournful-looking traveler," he said; "but cheer up—the first hundred years are always the worst! Have a drink? Vodka, old son?"

The vagabond shook his head.

"It's not that," he said at last.

"Perhaps it is this," Torpichen remarked good-naturedly.

He had in his hand some paper money, which he had taken out to pay his bill, and he pushed it across the table. The vagabond looked at it and seemed to hesitate, but after a moment he shook his head once more.

"No, it is not that," he repeated; "but if you will help me—"

"Well? What is it?"

"I must go to Italy."

"Nothing more? That is simple enough. Walk straight up that road, keep going, and there you are. That's Italy, over there."

"I've been turned back, there and everywhere. I can't get across the frontier. My papers—what are my passports and papers worth now? I am a Russian. Do you know what that means? It means that I have no country." Half to himself, he added: "The dogs have devoured it—the dogs of revolution that gnaw the bones of kings."

It was as if he was repeating a litany. In spite of his hairiness and dilapidation, and his air of helpless squalor, there was something tragic about him as he stood there, staring into an unseen world, where, seemingly, dire things were being done.

"Sorry!" Torpichen said. "It's bad, I know, but what can I do?"

The vagabond's suggestion was startling.

"You have a big car there," he whispered persuasively. "In the back of it, covered by those rugs, no one would think of looking for—me!"

Torpichen laughed grimly.

"They'll not have the chance," he declared bluntly. "I'm not smuggling Russkis into Italy. No, old son! You'll have to pad the hoof or fly across; but this may help you out—take it!"

It was quite a sum of money, but again the vagabond, after a momentary hesitation, refused.

"No, it is not that," he said once more.

He glanced furtively to right and left, and then, silently as he had come, backed away into the night.

"When a fellow like that won't take money," Torpichen told himself, "there's something wrong with him!"

He hammered on the iron table, but still the waiter did not come. Inside, the café was noisy with laughter and high-pitched voices and clattering glass. He shouted, but evidently his voice did not carry through, for it was his chauffeur who answered the call.

"Want me, sir? Nasty little place, this," he remarked in a friendly way. He was a chubby man, short in the leg, but he carried himself with dignity, and held his head up when he talked. He had noticed the vagabond, and gave his opinion. "Extraordinary fellow, sir! I saw you talking to him. I know that sort. He's a Russky. He'd have a knife into you like one o'clock if your back was turned. You can never trust a foreigner, sir."

Torpichen laughed.

"You seem to forget that so far as you are concerned, Marwick, I'm a foreigner myself—and far away from Broadway; but let's carry on."

He left some money on the table, and they went back together to the car. It was Torpichen who drove, while the chauffeur sat in the seat beside him. The big car picked up its speed and swung along the curving road toward Italy.

In the many weeks he had been idling on the Riviera, Torpichen had made the journey frequently. He and his big mouse-colored car and his chauffeur were so well known at the frontiers that it had become a mere formality to glance at his passport with its comprehensive *visa*:

*Pour tous pays.  
Valable six mois.  
Aller et retour.*

The French officials gave him a pleasant good night, as they sent him on his way. When he pulled up at the Italian station,



he found himself in a battle of voices, oaths, arguments, and waving lanterns. The officials were shouting, but above the clamor they made Torpichen distinguished a shrill voice raised in angry protest.

"I think I know that pleasant voice," he said, "and that temper!"

Beyond a doubt it was the ruffled gamester who had affronted him in Monte Carlo. The fellow was still snarling in his high-pitched, Slavic way. He was standing beside his motor car—a low, long-gutted torpedo, dyed bright yellow, like the hair of an actress. Half a dozen officials were pawing it over, throwing out the traveling bags and rugs, opening everything that could be opened or pried apart. A chief inspector was apologizing sarcastically, as he examined the passport.

"Prince Kurokin, eh? Very sorry, prince. It is quite in order, but we had instructions to be on the lookout to-night. It's all right. You can go on immediately, prince."

The other officials laughed, and their laughter was not nice. One gets back from an Italian precisely what one gives him. Courtesy and a smile are met with smiling courtesy. Truculent ill humor—as Prince Kurokin had discovered—is paid back with interest.

The inspectors had left his car in dire disorder. It was their way of getting even for the insolence he had displayed; and they stood watching him with complete enjoyment as he fumed over the job of getting his possessions stowed away. At last he drove off, pursued by derisive laughter.

It was all very puerile and silly, but it amused Torpichen immensely. There was something very Italian about this conspiracy to harry the ill-tempered foreigner—a son of the barbarians—who had come blustering up to the gateway of their sacred country.

Besides, Torpichen had had his own little quarrel with that swaggering son of exile. He rather enjoyed witnessing this Italian vengeance.

He was leaning forward in the light, smiling with perfect approval, when the inspector came toward him. It was his smile that brought an answering smile to the dark Italian face.

"Ah, it is you, *Signor Americano!* You saw him? A brute beast! A barbarian!" said the inspector, throwing out his hands in a wide gesture of contempt.

"You served him jolly well right," Torpichen answered, laughing.

"You saw him, yes?" The inspector waved aside the American passport, and motioned him to go on his way. "Good fortune—good night!"

Torpichen was still laughing as he sent the car forward, but there was no sign of mirth on Marwick's round face. Nothing in the incident at the frontier struck him as being amusing. They were all foreigners, and they had all acted like foreigners. What else was there to expect of them? Even Torpichen, he thought, might have shown more dignity; but there it was again—the foreigner in him coming out. Marwick kept his thoughts to himself.

It was a night without moon or stars, and, after Bordighera, they had the road to themselves. In spite of the curves and spirals of the way, Torpichen drove fast. He wondered why he had not overtaken Prince Kurokin's yellow torpedo, for he knew he had the speed of it. It must have turned off somewhere, he decided, for when he reached San Remo he had seen nothing of it.

The seaside town of San Remo was still awake, late as was the hour. Lights gleamed from the Casino and from the big hotels and villas.

"I'll drive around to the garage," Torpichen said.

The garage was behind his hotel, under the shoulder of the hill. It occupied one side of a short, broad street, new-paved and electric-lighted, while opposite it a dark lane opened and went twisting up to the old town, between windowless houses and crumbling walls. The new street lay like a neutral zone between the modern world of fashion and idleness along the seashore and the age-old mystery of ancient San Remo—that tragic mass of buildings piled in confusion on the hills above.

Torpichen pulled up the car and got out.

"Good night, Marwick," he said.

"Good night, sir."

As Torpichen paused to light a cigarette, the doors of the garage swung open, pouring out a flood of light. He threw down the match, set his heel on it, and walked slowly toward the avenue.

At that moment he heard a shout—an oath—from Marwick. He turned in time to see a tall figure rise in the back of the car—a shapeless thing wrapped in rugs. Then the rugs were tossed aside, and the

vagabond, infamous with hair and rags, leaped to the ground.

At first he seemed dazed, like a wild beast abruptly dragged into the light. He darted this way and that, crouching, hugging his filthy bundle. Suddenly, as if it were a burrow, he dashed into the stone lane toward the blackness and mystery of the old town.

The vagabond had crossed the frontier of his destiny.

## II

TORPICHEN had risen late in the day after his midnight ride to San Remo. He had friends enough, but he was in no mood for talk or golf, for horses or women, and he swung off for a tramp through the hills. He had luncheon in a little stone village clinging to the mountainside, and made his way homeward through narrow mule paths, twisting down beneath the olives.

He came out at last on a road he did not know, and saw, unexpectedly, the city and sea; and suddenly he was aware of its beauty.

In front of him the sea stretched away from Capo Verde, with its white sanctuary of Our Lady of the Guard, to Monte Corvi. Above it rose the triangle of San Remo, sheltered by its seven hills—old hills terraced with vine and olive, and shadowed with crumbling temples and towers.

He sat there on a stone bench by the wayside, and, for a while, he was very still. It was as if the pagan South, which glowed and shone all about him, had laid some sort of spell upon him. The rich vegetation, the acrid odor of plants and trees, woke all his pantheistic instincts. He felt a kind of affinity with the trees, and the languor of the vineyards. The magic of the South, which is woven of silence and fertility, of the palpitation and color of things, enveloped him; and his mood was one of quiet content.

The air was very still. The smoke of Torpichen's cigarette rose almost straight, sketching faint arabesques, mysterious as the lines of a hand. His sense of quietude deepened. Life, for him, seemed to be flowing like a little stream of water, peaceful and clear.

Even as he shaped this image—it was his habit to think in pictures—a sense of expectancy came upon him. It was not fear; it was not apprehension; it was that more terrifying thing—foreknowledge.

"The wild geese are honking!" he said softly.

He was no fool. He knew that nothing happens, even to the simplest man going blindly about his business, which has not been signaled to him again and again, with outcries and warnings.

Events never happen singly. They advance, he would say, like wild geese, in a flying squadron. One leads, and the others follow in a spreading wedge. Events, whether of the spiritual world or of the material world, call to one another at birth, with shrill cries. The fortunate events summon one another, and evil omen calls to evil omen. They rush together from the outposts of space, emerge from the caves of earth, fall headlong from the peaks of the moon—to the eternal stupefaction of the simple-minded man, who has never foreseen anything, never expected anything.

"The wild geese are honking!" Torpichen repeated.

More than once he had had these premonitions, and he had learned to heed them. Everything, he would say, means something. A stranger who jostles you as you pass, a beggar who cries to you in the night, the flight of a bird—everything means something, if one could only read its meaning.

Torpichen did not get up. He hardly shifted his position. Indeed, the only movement he made was to drop his cigarette and extinguish it.

The stone bench on which he sat was shaded by an old palm tree, grotesque, monstrous, with scales like some prehistoric fish. Leaning back against the tree, he was as motionless as if he were part of it. He glanced to right and left. On one side, the highway curved down toward the hotels and the sea; on the other, a narrow road skirted a ravine and struck off toward the old town of San Remo.

In the angle formed by the two roads he saw the villa.

Why had he not seen it before? It was as if only at this appointed instant of time it had come out of some cloud of mystery and disclosed itself; but now it was there, four square, thrusting itself at him.

It was a flat, drab-colored house of stucco, with balconies and verandas and pillars. Everything about it—even the fat, naked cupids sprawling on the balustrade—was a stucco sham, a lie that looks like stone. It was mean and pompous and false,

like some old hag painted to look like youth.

The garden in which the villa stood was surrounded by high walls. Torpichen had a fair view of it through the lofty iron gates. The gates were older, he thought, than the house, for the ironwork of them was curious and beautiful, rough with marks of the hammer. They had been beaten out, evidently, in the forge of a good workman's fancy, and their honesty mocked the stucco sham of the pillars and the sprawling cupids.

On either side of the gateway a cypress grew, towering and black. The garden itself was unkempt and lawless, and extended, Torpichen could see, to the abrupt ravine that inclosed two sides of it. What he could glimpse of it appeared to be less a garden than a tropical jungle of bamboos and tree ferns and giant grasses, through which rose the swords of the yuccas.

Along the wall a climbing fig tree spread its dark branches. There were other trees lining the white path, while beyond and nearer the ravine grew a tall Judas tree. It caught and held the young man's attention, for, although not a breath of air was stirring, its red-lined leaves were never for a moment still. They whispered and murmured together, moving mysteriously, as things move in the dark.

In this muttering conspiracy of the red leaves of the Judas tree there seemed to be something sinister and menacing; and Torpichen sat there, listening, waiting for he knew not what—for his premonition—for the honking of the wild geese.

From the narrow road a little dog came up furtively and paused. Then it ran swiftly across the highway, stirring up the white dust, and halted at the gates of the villa.

A man followed the dog, halted where the dog had paused, and then swiftly crossed the road. He was a short, slender, darkling figure of a man, in greenish clothes, and with a slouching hat, such as the peasants wear. Though he was erect and lithe, and stepped lightly, he gave the impression that in some way he was deformed and unnatural—as unnatural as a wild animal in cap and breeches. He had thick black hair, and black eyes that flashed under the rim of his old hat as if they reflected the sunlight.

For a while he peered through the gates, inspecting the garden and the shuttered

windows of the house. At last, as if satisfied with what he had seen, he pulled the bell handle and set a bell jangling. After that he waited patiently, the little dog crouching in the dust at his feet, until the front door of the villa opened and a butler appeared, looked at him insolently, and finally called out:

"Hey! What do you want?"

"Come and see."

"You be off about your business!" the big servant shouted. "You be off!"

The butler came briskly down the steps and along the path, as if he meant to take measures to enforce his orders.

The short man glanced over his shoulder, and from his lips there came a queer whistling sound. It was not the call of a bird, and yet there was in it something of the woodland wild calling to the wild.

As if it had been some sort of signal, a man came stealthily up from the road by the ravine. Torpichen stared with amazement. It was the vagabond who had stolen across the midnight frontier in his car.

Half dazed, fantastic, disreputable in his rags, the clean sunlight seemed to lend a new kind of infamy to this wretched outcast, emphasizing the degraded aspect of his discolored hair, of his matted beard, which covered his face to the cheek bones, and of his dirty, gesticulating hands. Otherwise he was just as Torpichen had seen him at the little café in Mentone, except that he was without the bundle that he had hugged so carefully during the adventure of the night.

The tattered clothes still bore every stain of wayfaring and weather. The long hair still straggled out under his hat. No—there was no change in his outward appearance; and yet Torpichen soon became conscious of a very radical change in the man himself. Just what it was he could not at first define; and then he saw that the vagabond's eyes were no longer wavering and furtive. They were wide open, fixed, glittering with excitement.

The fellow was breathing hard, either from weakness or passion. He steadied himself by clutching the iron bars with both hands, and clung there.

By this time the butler was at the gate.

"So there are two of you!" he exclaimed. "Well, be off with you, I say!"

Suddenly the insolence died out of him. He drew back at sight of the gaunt figure, with its terrible eyes, staring as if to drag



the soul out of his body. The voice that came from it was harsh and imperative:

"Open the gate! You hear?"

The servant's mouth gaped with astonishment. This insolence from a wretched beggar was a bit too much. Indignation choked him.

"Open!" the vagabond repeated, shaking the iron gates in a frenzy that seemed half rage and half despair.

It was then that the butler found voice.

"Out of here, you damned beggar!" he shouted, adding a word of obloquy which is never printed in any language.

The result was so unexpected that it brought Torpichen to his feet. It was as if he were seeing, before his very eyes, one human being abruptly transforming himself into another and quite a different person. It was something miraculous, like water changing itself to wine. He watched the scene as if spellbound.

The vagabond stepped back a pace and drew himself up to his full height—Torpichen saw he was a tall man—and all the weakness and passion fell away from him. It was as if his agitation had been a cloak, which he suddenly let fall to the ground, disclosing the real man who had been disguised in it. He stood there towering, implacable, silent—and in his silence there was something more menacing than anything that words or oaths could convey. He stared down at the flunky with his cold eyes.

When at last he spoke, his voice was level and calm—deadly calm.

"I've had quite enough of this," he said. "Remember, I will permit no further insolence of any kind. Go at once to your master, and tell him I desire to see him without delay."

The instinct of cowardice, which watches over a flunky's destiny and keeps him out of danger, had warned the butler that he was treading a perilous path. There was a certain compromise in the half respectful tone that he used in reply.

"My master is not at home," he said, politely enough. Then, as his glance took in the vagabond's scarecrow rags, he added, as if in spite of himself: "And he wouldn't see you if he was."

"He will see me if you—"

"I tell you he is not here."

"Then he will be here very soon, and when he comes he will see me. Do you understand?"

"I understand my orders, and they are not to admit your sort. Orders are orders, and it's my business to obey them."

"Very well, but my business is with your master. Tell him that."

"All right," returned the butler negligently, turning on his heel and moving toward the house.

"Come back here!" the vagabond ordered. Though he did not raise his voice, there was an intensity in it that jerked the flunky around as if he had been hauled by a taut cord. "You will give your master this from me."

Opening his coat at the breast, the vagabond drew from a pocket in his canvas shirt a small oblong package tied with a string. He held it out through the bars of the gate. The butler, after a slight hesitation, took it gingerly, balanced it for a moment, and then, laying it on the palm of his open hand, inspected it as if it were some peculiarly unpleasant kind of insect, which nevertheless fascinated him.

"You understand that it is for your master. Give it to him as soon as he returns—remember!"

Without a word, with merely a sullen shrug of his shoulders, the servant turned and walked toward the house. It was not until he had gone in and shut the door that the vagabond moved. Then, suddenly, as if all the will power in him had turned to water, he shrank back into the shambling, uncertain thing he had been—a thing of rags and dirt and feebleness that was an insult to the light of day. He laid his hand on the peasant's shoulder, and the two men moved away, their feet dragging in the dust. After them slouched the furtive dog.

They had not glanced toward the bench where Torpichen lingered half concealed by the old tree. Without looking back, in silence, they shuffled down the road that skirted the ravine and led toward the old town and the seven hills of San Remo.

Torpichen watched them until they were out of sight, around the bend of the road. Then he looked once more at the mysterious villa, with its closed doors and shuttered windows, and its brooding air of ill omen. There was silence, unbroken even by the cry of a bird—silence that would have been absolute had it not been for the ceaseless muttering of the red-leaved Judas tree.

As he went his way toward the promenade by the sea, Torpichen found that,



going with him, was a haunting memory of the silent house and the red tree, of the peasant with his half human signal, of the furtive dog in the dust, and of the vagrom man who had thrust himself into a life that had been, hitherto, peaceful enough. What were they to him? What the deuce had he to do with this brawl at the iron gates? Who could tell?

"The wild geese are flying," he said to himself once more, and laughed.

These events coming one after the other—streaming past him as the wild geese stream overhead—were they winged omens of what the future held for him?

At that moment he looked up and saw the woman.

She was coming toward him from the glory of the public gardens, and behind her lay the blue silk of the shimmering sea. She walked slowly, swinging in her naked hand a great bunch of scarlet iris flowers. As she drew near, she gave him her eyes for a moment. They were gay and good, but there was malice in her smile.

When she had passed, he turned and watched her—the rhythmic and carnal body, the red amber of her hair, the long white hand, and the wanton glow of the iris. His eyes were cynical as he gazed.

### III

THE midwinter crowd, as usual, was parading up and down the promenade from the pastry cook's shop at the corner to the far end of the Giardino Pubblico, taking the sunlight and the sea air.

It was a pilgrim world gathered from all the white continents. There were Americans of the North and the South, English walking for digestion, soft-stepping Latins, new Germans thrusting about and quite unaware of their absurdity, new Slavs wearing humility as if it were a garment.

Torpichen, sitting in the shade, watched them idly. He had walked far that day, and was glad to rest his long legs—glad, also, to rest his thoughts, which had been busy with omens.

It was pleasant enough to watch the particolored crowd as it made shifting patterns on the paths. He noticed, perhaps for the first time, how singularly lacking in reticence humanity really is. Each one of these people, he thought, might just as well have been wearing a label, like the figures in the comic newspaper pictures. They had known the hazards of life, and their

look, their walk, their carriage, told the story.

It was odd that he had never noticed it before, but perhaps that was because he had always been part of the crowd, while to-day he felt aloof from it; and now that he was a mere onlooker, they all seemed to be giving themselves away. All of them—the handsome Italian officers in the pride of their blue; pathetic old gentlemen dragging legs that would never dance again; muscular girls, white-shod, shower-bathed, high-headed before the adversary, man; and those other women who coughed, held handkerchiefs to their lips, and lived in an odor of creosote. Hunters for health or pleasure, they were all giving themselves away.

There was the old diplomat, gray of hair and eye and mustache, with the jowls of a flesh eater. It was plain enough now to Torpichen, in his new mood of perceptivity, that old Sir Humphrey's face was a witness against him. The obese banker rolling along beside him, talking with his hands—why, the fellow's mere gestures were an autobiography! The two of them looked as if they might have been something swept out, with the dust of the room, after a peace conference.

Giving themselves away!

A little donkey came ambling by, a velvet packsaddle on its spine, a brown-legged girl at its bridle. From the shadows of the garden two monks appeared—a Carthusian in the habit of his order, the whiteness of it corresponding symbolically to the resurrection of Our Lord, and a Benedictine, whose black robe figured the mystery of His death. They advanced gravely, their eyes bent on the ground, their lips moving.

Those two, Torpichen thought, were not giving themselves away. He wondered what dream, what tragedy of sacrifice, was hidden beneath the anonymous robes. Perhaps there was nothing to reveal—mere barren lives covered with sackcloth.

An imperative voice from a motor car hailed him, and a hand heavy with rings beckoned him.

"Andrew!"

It was the Princess Castelmare, massive, opulent, imperious. As she leaned out from the car, the beauty she displayed was that of a pouter pigeon. Torpichen hastened up to her.

"How d'y'e do, princess?" he said, and touched the jeweled hand. Behind the glit-

tering abundance of the princess he made out the lank head of the diplomat, whom she had evidently picked up. "How d'ye do, Sir Humphrey?" he added.

"I've only a moment, Andrew," the princess went on in her rapid, dominant way. Her accent proclaimed a youth spent in some strident Chicago. "I'm glad I saw you here. You know you are dining with me to-night. You haven't forgotten?"

"No, princess, how could I? So very glad to come—been looking forward to it."

"Then that's settled. Nine o'clock, or a quarter past. Don't be late. I don't know why you can never be on time, Andrew. I'm sure you've nothing to do."

"That's the reason, princess."

"It's a small dinner, but I'm so glad to give you a chance of meeting my *padre*—the baron, you know—and, of course, dear Sir Humphrey and Lady Milding—"

The princess interrupted herself long enough to bestow a large, firm smile on the old diplomat.

"Hugh Forbess came this afternoon," she went on. He has been in Scotland, and the Demdykes are staying on with his father, so we shall have all the news. I'm sure Betty is having the time of her life—"

"I'm glad of that," Torpichen interposed quietly.

"Nine o'clock, Andrew! I haven't another minute to give you."

Torpichen always wondered how so large and so imposing a woman could talk so fast and say so little. One would have expected her to speak with a gravity befitting the majesty of her appearance, but she always chattered, and her chatter was chiefly of people with titles and jewels and pedigrees.

"Good-by!"

"She's a fearsome old girl," Torpichen thought, as he strolled back to the shade and a chair.

He remembered her in his boyhood days, when she had been a handsome, pleasant enough sort of woman. She was his aunt, in a way, for in that conquering youth of hers she had married old Matt Bulmer, his great-uncle. That rugged old financier had covered her with jewels and paraded her around the world before he died—possibly of pride in his matrimonial achievement—and left her the rugged millions he was really forced to leave behind him when he departed. The widow had hustled her way through the world, marrying an Italian prince of the great Castelmare family. He,

too, had gone his way to a quieter world, leaving her the splendor of his age-old title. And she had carried on, climbing—cleaving her way with a gold battle-ax. She was indeed a fearsome lady!

The crowd began to drift away. It was the hour for cakes and tea. In the casino an orchestra, which no merely human power could prevent from playing Puccini, struck up.

It was a curious thing about Torpichen that he did not like music—not even bad music. He stood up and looked seaward. A white steam yacht lay outside the harbor. A motor boat shot past the Molo, and made for the yacht. Torpichen watched it, for movement always interested him.

Suddenly he heard a woman's laughter.

It was laughter so blithe and human that he turned to see whence it came. The blond woman was parleying with the donkey drivers by the curb—brown fellows with grinning mouths—and once more she laughed aloud. Involuntarily Torpichen took a step toward her. Then he halted and looked at her with open curiosity.

He noticed her white dress, the big white hat with the jasper-headed pins stuck in it, the pelt of a white fox hanging over one shoulder, and the scarlet iris flowers swaying in her hand. She was a slender, long-limbed woman. Her hair was red amber. As she stood there, stroking the head of a shaggy donkey, jesting with the red-capped boys, she made a wonderfully bright and winsome picture.

Turning a little, she faced Torpichen. For the second time their eyes met and did not release each other.

She smiled a little, as very young children smile. Her eyes still in his eyes, she came and stood in front of him.

He spoke first.

"Which way shall we walk?" he asked in a matter-of-fact way.

"I don't care—anywhere," she answered. She was perfectly at ease. There was a bit of mockery in her upturned face as she added: "You want me to decide? This way, then!"

They strolled through the Giardino Pubblico and out along the white road. A great wall went with them on their right, and over the top of it showed the daggers of the yuccas. On the other side of the road was the gloom of the cemetery, where enormous cypresses threw their shadows over the marble tombs.

"You must take me there," she said. "I love cemeteries."

"Now?"

"Some other day."

So there was to be another day! He was not quite sure; but what did it matter? To-day was to-day.

She smiled up at him. Her eyes were so fresh a blue, it seemed to him, that she might be using them for the first time. The blue sky mirrored itself in them. Surely nothing evil had ever passed in those innocent depths!

They reflected space, the pure sky, life eternal; and yet there was something else—Torpichen could not define it. For all their candor, her eyes were haunted by some obscure and obstinate dream.

"Well?" she asked. "Have you reached a conclusion? Am I pretty?"

"Worse than that," he replied gravely.

"But am I?"

"Yes. You would be a terrible woman to love!"

"Fortunately, you needn't think of that, need you?" she answered lightly, and quickened her steps.

Before he overtook her, he had printed upon his mind a memory so indelible that he knew it had become a permanent possession, not to be lost in the years. It was a memory of the turquoise sea and the white road and the glory of the sunlight in which she walked—and of her laughter. She laughed like the soul of his race.

"I am a pagan," she told him.

"You are an Aryan," he replied. "You are good and gay, like the race of Aryans, born and to be born. Laughter is your blood heritage."

From the instant of their meeting Torpichen carried himself with the air of an old acquaintance. She, on her part, had met the situation without the slightest embarrassment. They had stepped into an immediate understanding. Instinctively they had attained, in a manner not quite clear, a frank sense of comradeship.

They walked along the white road by the sea, each trying to please the other.

Now and then a carriage passed, drawn by little Ligurian ponies, with nodding plumes in their bridles; or an automobile in a cloud of dust.

"Who are you?" she asked suddenly.

"You really want to know?"

"Yes, I think I do. It might be interesting, if you talked honestly—but would

you? That's the only thing I don't like about being a woman—we can't get the truth out of you."

"Perhaps, if you got it," he said, "you might not like it. All may be for the best."

"No, no!" she answered quickly. "I shouldn't mind what it was, so long as it was really true—just what you meant! Sometimes I think I am dying of hunger for real things and real people."

"You must be lonely."

"You think so?" She looked at him with eyes that darkened a little, and then went on more lightly: "No, I am interested in every one, and I am particularly interested"—she smiled up at him—"in you. It is quite true. I am interested in you, and in that old woman in the doorway, and the man up there digging among the vines. Do you see that man? What shoulders! I should like to talk to him, and to listen while he told me all about his life."

"Vampirish, isn't it?"

"What a monstrous thing to say!"

"By way of symbol only," Torpichen explained. "You know the vampire is supposed to take a great deal of interest in other people's lives. In fact, it lives on them."

She stopped suddenly, and turned and looked at him—a frequent trick of hers, he was to discover—with narrow and suspicious eyes. There was a blue flame in them like an alcohol flame, cold and equivocal. Torpichen wondered what enigma in her life he had touched upon by a chance word. He gave no sign of understanding, and met her look with friendly candor.

"What is it?" he asked.

Of a sudden she smiled, and took again her look of a little girl, shallow and gay and good.

"Really and truly I am interested in you," she said.

"I'm glad you are."

"That's nice of you not to say anything silly. It isn't personal"—she paused reflectively—"or is it? You see, it's like this. I am curious about everything. I can never see a little box without wanting to open it. It is the same with men and women."

"And donkeys and donkey boys," Torpichen interposed, laughing. "I couldn't help seeing you. It was charming. Ah!" he exclaimed. "Now I know—"

"What?"

Again her eyes narrowed.

"Why, I have been thinking of you in terms of light—of sunshine and fire—"

"That's nice of you," she interposed, satisfied.

"I should like to call you Atar. You remember? She was a daughter of the sun goddess, but she wouldn't stay in the sky. She came down to live on the smoky hearths, near men and women."

"Yes—I would have done that. What was her name?"

They turned out of the highway into a bridle path that wound up the hills. After a time, during which neither of them spoke, they sat down in the lean shade of an olive tree.

He openly admired her—the faint reds in her cheeks, the white tones of her ears and temples and throat, and, above all, her hair—more than anything else, her hair. It was abundantly copper and gold, with here and there the light of amber in it. Her forehead was broad and low. Her mouth was not very small, and her lips were full, delicately fashioned but strong, as if they could endure devastating kisses.

Her eyes were marvelously blue—blue as the sky in some old saga of the North—unqualified blue. They were open upon Torpichen at that moment, studying his face, observing—

She was a slender woman, lithe and long of limb, with graceful wrists and ankles. Beneath the thin gown he could discern the round knees and the delicate curves of her strong, clean body. She gave him an impression of something close to nature, splendidly animal, hungry, swift-burning and exultant with life. Not Atar, herself, he thought, was nearer to the source of being.

He lifted his eyes to her face once more. She was smiling faintly, like a pleased child.

"You like me?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And my hair?"

"Let me see it."

She drew out the jasper-headed pins, gave them to him to hold, and laid her hat on the stone beside her. Then, with one swift gesture, she let down her abundant hair.

It fell in waves of copper and amber and brass to her knees, shrouding her body. It was a flood of flame, in which Torpichen wondered how many lovers had bathed!

Then he had a sudden vision of her past,

very actual, inexorably precise, but what did it matter? Surely he of all men had done with this kind of folly! Yes, for him—and he thanked God—that sort of thing was over, for no *Circe* in all the world would he go on all fours and crunch the acorns of unclean love. No and no and no, he repeated in his heart, and thanked God.

A strange perfume, mystic, hallucinate, came from her torrential hair as she swept it back over her head and then drew it down so that it framed her young face. Her blue eyes were bright and ardent. He leaned toward her until her shoulder touched his breast, and for a long time they sat there in silence.

Some kind of wild life stirred in the trees overhead. On a gray stone wall a swift darting lizard posed for them. It was the sun lizard worshipping his departing god.

"I must go," she murmured lazily.

Slowly she gathered up her hair and coiled it on her head. He gave her the hat and jasper pins; then he stooped and lifted her to her feet.

"You are strong!" she whispered.

"Yes."

"Come—you know how quickly the dark comes on. I must get back."

She ran lightly down the path. He picked up the spray of flowers that she had left at the foot of the olive tree, and, running swiftly, overtook her.

"Which way are we going?" he inquired.

"I live in the Berigo. I'll show you a short cut. You shall come with me to the house, say good night, very nicely, and go away."

"Until—"

"No—to-day is complete in itself. It is like a little box. We have put some pleasant hours in it—haven't we?—and now the lid is falling. The little box is almost shut."

"Every day is another day."

"Perhaps," she assented carelessly.

They walked rapidly, as if darkness were weighing upon them. Night was fast closing in over the hills and the sea. The stars were faint and few. They spoke now and then, but words did not seem to be necessary. Their understanding was based upon something deeper than mere human speech.

Occasionally he took her hand, to steady her where the way was rough. She would let her hand linger a moment in his, and then release it very gently. For Torpichen it was as if he were walking in a night of



brooding enchantment, through an unreal world. Nothing was real, except her presence, whitely visible in the dusk, and the spell she had laid upon him.

They came out on an unlighted road, bordering a ravine. Before long it curved sharply and brought them to a pair of shadowy gates. She touched his arm and checked him.

"I am home now," she said gently, as if the quiet of the night were too mysteriously beautiful to be broken save by a whisper. "It has been very good of you, and you have been nice from beginning to end. Good night!"

He could make out the gates, and, beyond, trees and a grayish mass that loomed up like a house.

She gave him her hand. He held it fast, and drew her toward him. She laughed softly, and, leaning away from him, turned an electric switch set in the gatepost.

It was as if the whole world had changed, so fierce a light leaped up, tearing across the night, flooding the road and the paths, beating upon the villa, with its pillars and balconies and cupids and flaming windows, inundating the tangled jungle of a garden, with the Judas tree rising naked in the light and its red leaves dancing together.

Torpichen reeled back, his eyes blinded by the sudden glare, and also by a vague blindness in his mind. An enchantress's wand might have done this thing, evoking out of darkness and silence this fantastic world of light. No doubt she would vanish into its radiance as dreams hide themselves in daylight!

Home?

It was her home—here, where he had seen the evil faces and heard the voices of menace and anger—the vagabond's outcry and the dark little fellow who spat in the dust—here!

"Come away!" he wanted to say. "You must not go in. Terrible things are in there. Come away!" But he could find no words.

There were hurrying footsteps on the gravel path. The iron gates swung open. He heard the butler's deferent voice. They were talking Italian.

"*Signora*," the servant said.

"Again good night!"

Once more she gave Torpichen her hand. The warmth of it seemed to sink into his own cold hand—to sink into it and to run through all his veins.

"I—I can't say good night to you!" he whispered.

She turned away, and, laughing, sped up the shining path to the house. Then the lights in the garden went out, leaving him in violent and sudden darkness.

#### IV

THE telephone bell rang loudly, perhaps for the second time.

Torpichen was lying on the couch in his room at the hotel, staring up at the ceiling, painting there pictures of a woman among the olive trees, of a woman speeding up a radiant pathway to a house ablaze with magic light, always of a woman—of her eyes and hair and mouth.

He tore himself away from these dream pictures, and reluctantly went over to the telephone.

"Yes! Who is it?"

Then, in answer to the determined voice at the other end, he poured out apology and explanation.

"I've been detained, princess. I'm just off—please pardon me!"

It was nearly nine o'clock. He had forgotten all about his dinner engagement, and he was still in tweeds. He changed as rapidly as possible, but he was half an hour late when his motor car deposited him at the door of the princess's *palazzo*. In the drawing-room he repeated his apologies.

"It's quite all right, Andrew," the princess said. "I counted on your being late. You always are. That's why I telephoned. You know Lady Milding?"

Yes, he knew Lady Milding, and her jade ornaments, and her round, bulbous eyes, and her meaningless round face. He knew Sir Humphrey, her husband, with his mask of an old diplomat; and this was Hugh Forbess—yes.

"How d'ye do?"

"How d'ye do?"

They were tall men, both. Torpichen was rather dark, upstanding, virile, giving an impression of nervous energy and outgoing life. Hugh Forbess, leaner of build, was a handsome man, gray of eye, with reddish hair and clean-cut features. They looked at each other for a moment, and, moved by a common impulse of sympathy, shook hands.

"*Padre*," the princess was saying, "this is Andrew Torpichen."

Across the wide drawing-room there came striding a tall old man, square-shouldered,

powerful, in a long black cassock that whipped his heels.

"Baron Testevi," the princess added; "but you, too, may call him *padre*."

Torpichen found his hand gripped, and the old Jesuit turned a smiling face on him. It was a good face to look upon, frank and sincere, but made fine and keen by the habit of thought. The gray eyes were both shrewd and kindly; and yet instinctively Torpichen felt a kind of antipathy to this impressive old man in his flapping robes of dingy black. He didn't look like a priest. He looked as if he should be leading a cavalry charge against a horde of black-skinned savages.

In spite of this antipathy, however, Torpichen walked at the *padre's* side as they went in to dinner. It was a small gathering—only the six of them—and they dined at a little table at one end of the huge dining room with windows looking out on the sea. It was a lofty and ornate room, marble and gilt and crystal, lighted with innumerable shallow bowls and a stream of yellow fire that ran around the cornices.

The princess did not love concealment. Her fifty years could still confront the light of day or of electric lamps. She loomed over the table. She was majestic. Her great white throat, her large shoulders and arms, gleamed with diamonds, and her fingers were covered with rings, as if old Matt Bulmer's wealth had rained down upon her in a shower of jewels.

She was always happy when the war paint lay thick upon her, and to-night she knew she was looking her best. The dominant face, with the high cheek bones and the square, heavy chin, wore a look of masterful content. She smiled at the *padre*, who sat on her left, at Sir Humphrey, on her right, and at Lady Milding, who faced her, between Torpichen and the grave, unsmiling Forbess.

She talked religion, even with the caviar. She had always been a religious woman, even in old Matt Bulmer's day. Indeed, it was in Torpichen's memory that she had had every religion, one after the other, that a nice woman can have. Her spiritual adventures had ranged through almost all the creeds. It was during a victorious experience of theosophy that she had married old Matt; but theosophy was not quite the thing, she knew, for the widow of the Prince Castelmare. Her Catholicism was now quite as much a part of her as her title,

her palaces in Rome and San Remo, her house in Paris, and her flat in New York.

In her new zeal she had determined to add to the ten thousand churches of Italy another church which should ornately proclaim her piety to present and future generations. She talked of it to the *padre*, and he listened in silent approval.

When there came a pause in the conversation, the *padre* spoke across the table to Forbess.

"You'll be writing to your father soon?" he asked. "Then give him my love. We rarely write to each other now—not that we've lost interest in each other, but life for both of us, I dare say, is full of duties."

"He often speaks of you," Forbess replied. "Indeed, I've heard of you all my life, *padre*."

"I was Sir John Forbess's tutor," the priest explained, "when he was a boy—for many years and in many places. You are very like him. I would have known you for his son had I seen you in the street. Is he well?"

"Very well, thank you. He is always fit."

Lady Milding had found Torpichen easy to talk to, and had begun a feeble anecdote of Russia.

"We were there so many years. It was appalling! Such a dreadful country! Even now, when I dream of it"—she lowered her voice to a whisper—"I wake up screaming."

"It must indeed have been awful for you, those years in Russia," Torpichen said sympathetically.

"It was terrible," she went on in the same low voice. "There were dead everywhere—and so many of them our dear, dear friends! That was not the worst, for they, at least, were dead; but those who didn't die—think of those who didn't die!"

This low voice, hinting horrors, here at the bright dinner table, was ghastly.

"You should think of the help you were able to give, and of the good you did—you and Sir Humphrey," Torpichen said gently.

"Yes, we tried; and I don't think of it—only to-night it came back. I wonder why it came back to-night! Oh, it was so much worse when they were not dead!" She gave a sort of shudder. "I saw the chateau burning, and—"

Sir Humphrey's thin, level voice cut, as if with metal, into the recital she had just begun.

"You were saying, dear—"

Lady Milding looked up with a start.

"The Kurokins. I was telling Mr. Torpichen about the château, and—"

"Yes?" her husband interposed.

"And the three needles," she resumed tremulously.

"No, my dear, please!" Sir Humphrey said with cold finality. "You know that can't be told. It simply can't be told." To the others he explained: "Quite an awful atrocity, and the victims were the Kurokins. It is hard for my wife to forget, but it can't be told."

The diplomat's manner was polite enough, but it carried a certain air of reproof, and Lady Milding flushed. The other guests shared her embarrassment, and the hostess, always alert, came to her rescue. She made no reference to the "three needles," though she shared the curiosity of those who had heard the mysterious phrase; but she did not dismiss the Kurokins from the conversation. That, she thought, would have been too abrupt.

"You mentioned the Kurokins, Sir Humphrey. How interesting! You know the prince is here this season. Such a charming man! Related to the nicest people—all the Gotha, as we say. You must meet him, Andrew. I am sure you and he will be great friends."

"Prince Kurokin? But I have met him, dear aunt," Torpichen replied, with a grim smile, "and no longer ago than last night."

"Last night?"

"At Monte Carlo."

"I'm so glad, Andrew!"

"He wasn't. I knocked him down."

The *padre's* eyes twinkled, and Forbess laughed aloud. The horror on Lady Milding's face was tragic.

"You — knocked — him — down!" the princess gasped.

"Yes: He was rude, and a bit more than rude."

"He would be," the *padre* put in quietly. "I've noticed that there is a good deal of the savage in that man."

The princess was pleased to learn that the *padre* thought none the worse of her truculent nephew.

"On the contrary," the priest added, "I think the better of him."

"Still," the princess persisted, "one doesn't go about knocking people down, does one?"

"He fell soft, aunt," said Torpichen.

"There was a nice piece of turf there. It's not worth talking about."

"If there isn't a scandal!"

"Nothing that that man can say or do," stated the *padre* decisively, "could injure Mr. Torpichen in any way. Kurokin's life is not quite what you think it is, princess—at least, I fear it is not."

"And I thought him so charming!"

The old diplomat put the subject away.

"Your yacht, isn't it, Forbess? I see she bears the white ensign. I watched her come in."

"Yes — I came overland to Marseilles and picked the yacht up there."

"You haven't told me how Betty is," the princess said.

"I am sure she is quite well," Forbess replied.

"My niece, you know — Betty Demydyke," the hostess explained. "She and my sister have been stopping with Sir John. Are they staying on?"

"For a few days. I think you may expect them in a week or so."

"Is Betty as pretty as ever?"

"She is the prettiest girl I ever saw," Forbess replied, his gray eyes kindling with admiration.

"There, Andrew! What about that?"

"I think Forbess has extremely good taste—and good judgment," Torpichen answered quietly; but he did not look at the young Englishman, and relapsed into moody silence.

During the rest of the dinner he spoke very little. Forbess, however, was almost eloquent, so long as he could keep the conversation upon Betty, or even upon Betty's mother, who seemed to be a sort of next best thing. He explained that Betty was very keen on yachting. That was why he had brought the yacht around to San Remo. He hoped they would cruise—all of them, he hoped. He wanted to take in the islands.

They were all ready with acceptances, save Torpichen, who might not have heard.

"If you'd care to take a run to-morrow, I'd be awfully glad to take you out. We can have luncheon aboard and get back early. Will you?"

Again they agreed.

"And you, Torpichen?"

"I? Oh, thanks! I don't know. I'm afraid I can't go to-morrow. No — I've something very important—very important. Thank you, Forbess." He got up abruptly.

ly. "You must excuse me, princess," he said hastily. "May I go now? It is very important."

"Andrew! You are ill?"

"No, I am not ill; but please—please excuse me."

He repeated his apologies, touched his hostess's hand, and went swiftly out of the room.

The princess raised her eyebrows, shrugged her massive shoulders, and said:

"If that isn't Andrew all over! You must forgive him. I'm so sorry! He is eccentric—quite eccentric at times. Of course you know he is not really my nephew—a connection by marriage. He is one of the Bulmers, and they are all—" She broke off. "The coffee is in the drawing-room. Shall we go?"

They did not linger long over the coffee. Torpichen's brusque departure had left a sense of embarrassment. It was not at all the sort of thing the Mildings liked, and they were the first to go. Then the *padre* slipped out.

Young Forbess stood by the princess's chair, looking down at her.

"You know, I should like to tell you about Betty," he began; "but I think—I hope you understand. I wonder if you will help me!"

"I'm not sure I do understand."

"I have never spoken to Betty about anything—the way I feel, you know. I wanted her to have a chance to get better acquainted with me—to learn to like me."

"Betty!" the princess exclaimed. "You don't mean you are in love with Betty?"

"Yes."

"But—"

"That is the reason I am here—for her. If I may count on your approval—"

He brought the words out diffidently. The princess stood up and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"You poor, poor boy!" she murmured, and her voice was full of motherly kindness. "Do you not know—have you not heard—that Betty is engaged to marry Andrew Torpichen? The announcement is to be made as soon as they reach San Remo."

It was a blow, but he took it gravely, standing perhaps a trifle straighter, facing her steadily; but underneath the quiet surface was a tumult of pain and confusion.

"It is kind of you to tell me," he said, after a moment. "I did not know—I could not know."

She watched him with sympathetic eyes. When he bade her good night and turned away, she made no effort to detain him. Frivolous and careless she was, but she had seen something in his quiet face that awed her. She knew that she had been given a glimpse of the anguish a man may carry in his soul and still live.

Forbess went out into the night. He was glad of the darkness. He took refuge in it. He walked a few steps and then stood still. He could not think, for always that tumult of confused pain was racing through him, drowning his thoughts—sweeping them away.

A strong hand fell on his arm.

"Come with me, Forbess." The *padre's* voice reached him as through a cloud. "To-night I'll put you up in the chalet. It was your father's home in the old days, and you will find it good to be there. Come!"

They went together through the dark streets. The old priest, in his all-comprehending wisdom, did not speak, except once, when he said gently:

"You will be alone—and very quiet."

## V

FORBESS came out on the terrace in front of the little stone chalet, where he had found loneliness, if not peace. Somehow or other the night had passed. He had been hard hit by the news of Betty's engagement, but he kept himself in hand. His kind of love was not a tempest that could express itself only in noise and fury. It was something deep within him—something he could not show to any one, since Betty was lost to him. Not even to little Betty could he tell it now.

Perhaps the *padre* knew. Beyond doubt the *padre* knew. Indeed, what was hidden from those wise old eyes? Something lightly said must have told him the story. A word, a gesture, a look, had betrayed the secret of the young man's love.

The old priest had known, too, that it was a hopeless love. The princess must have confided in him the secret of Betty's betrothal to Torpichen. The rest he had foreseen. Therefore he had waited until Forbess came out into the night, had taken his arm in a fatherly way, and had led him up to this little stone dwelling of loneliness, where he might get himself in hand. A kindly thought of his father's old friend and tutor!



In the morning a man had brought Forbess's luggage from the hotel. An angular old woman—a woman of few words—had waited upon him, with pride in the service, setting out his breakfast. She had spoken of the *padre* with reverence, and had called him *monsieur le baron*. The old priest had once been a man of the world. He remembered—yes!

To the left of the terrace upon which Forbess stood was the house of the Jesuits. Its back was against the old tower and the gloomy bulk of buildings that rose, one upon the other, like a monstrous and ancient city. This was old San Remo. In its huddled confusion, narrow streets twisted aimlessly about, climbing flights of stone steps, sinking into vaulted passages, or diving beneath broken arches—a labyrinth of time-old masonry, over which sinuous, dingy vines clambered and drooped.

Upon this crumbling monument of a dead civilization—the medieval world of warfare and lust, which belonged to the sons of adventure—the great house turned its back. It opened every door and window on the spacious garden of the Jesuits, which descended in broad terraces to the stony bed of the *torrente* and to the gates that shut it off from the town.

The garden was beautiful. There was always a murmur in the vines, the olive trees, and the palms. There was sunlight on the white stairs, curving down from terrace to terrace among the orange trees and the lighter flame of the lemons.

Beyond the garden wall, the city, blond and red, crept down to the blue of the bay, which shimmered like scarabs of sapphire, of emerald, of gold. That white blur seaward was Forbess's yacht, lying motionless on the calm water.

He crossed to the edge of the terrace in front of the chalet. Looking down, he saw some one moving swiftly, furtively, with a kind of limping activity, among the trees. He tried to make out what kind of a man it was, flitting to and fro there in the garden, where he had fancied that only the priests walked, conning prayers. Once the fellow stood for an instant, posed full in the sunlight, just beneath him, and Forbess saw him distinctly.

A strange figure, lean, short, muscular, with a hollow chest and powerful arms, dressed in ill-fitting garments that wind and sun and rain had turned to a dingy green. He wore no hat, and his hair stood

in tufts, coarse and thick, on his head; but it was his face that caught and held Forbess's attention, as the little man turned and stared up craftily, over his hunched shoulder, at the young Englishman.

The forehead was low and hairy. The cheek bones made harsh angles under the skin. The thin lips were drawn back, displaying the teeth; but the eyes—the creature's eyes—Forbess had never seen such eyes in the head of anything human. They were hidden in caverns under thick, hairy brows, and they were the eyes of something older than humanity, pale, fixed—eyes that had looked into secret places—upon hidden things.

Even as Forbess watched him, the little man was gone, slipping away among the tree trunks. At his heels, furtive as he, crept a little red dog.

"Who was that down there?" Forbess asked of the tall servant who had come from the chalet.

"I did not see any one," Lucrezia said stolidly.

"And the *padre*—have you seen him?"

"He is in the garden yonder, *signore*."

The priest was coming toward them, his gray head bare, his long robe swinging to his stride. A strange old man! Forbess had often heard the history of his life of adventure. A nobleman of an ancient house, he had been a soldier in his youth, and then a diplomat in the service of his country. He had gamed, made love, and intrigued for power in half the courts of eastern Europe.

He who has once drunk of this heady wine rarely sets down the cup until it is empty; but the Baron Testevi, still young, had sickened of it. He knew the black hours; and neither love nor wine nor power could lighten them. What he wanted he found in the church and the black robe of the Jesuit. The stern service of his order took him into the Far East, and into many distant lands, on his apostolic mission. After the years he had come back to Europe—to San Remo, to the old monastery that the Jesuit fathers built in the early days of their order.

All this Forbess knew, and he could not easily understand how a man who had known the sense of power that comes from rank and fortune, who had drunk deep of every emotion, who had loved and killed, could find satisfaction in this life of little things. He had yet to realize that the

somber cassock covered a greater sense of power, a more magnificent pride, than any the world could give.

The old *padre* was both kindly and wise. After installing the young man in the quiet chalet, he had left him to himself, knowing that wounded love and wounded self-esteem heal best alone. He had shown him the comforts of the little house—the books and the wine. Before saying good night, he had bethought him of the yachting cruise planned for the coming day.

"You'll not want to go on with that," he had suggested. "Best put it off. I'll send word down to every one. Leave it to me."

Forbess had acquiesced. It seemed of supreme indifference to him, now that Betty was taken out of his life. He did not care to see those people—none of them—not the princess—not Torpichen.

A night's rest had brought back self-control, if not peace, and with it a desire for human companionship. He hailed the *padre*, and joined him in the garden.

"How d'y'e do?" said the old man. "Shall we sit here? From this bench you can see all our domain." He chuckled at the pompous word. "This is where I sit and plan the great work."

The "great work" was that of recovering, bit by bit, the property of which the Jesuits had been stripped in the last anticlerical *juria*. They had got back the ancient monastery to the left of the garden, and had recovered many of the old houses on the hill that sloped down, on the other side, to San Stefano.

"Slowly," said the *padre*, "slowly it will all come back to us."

"And then?"

"Oh, then," the old man replied with tolerant cynicism, "they will kick us out again. We came here more than three hundred years ago. We built all those houses above your head, and old San Stefano below. Our schools covered half the hill yonder above the *torrente*. In those days San Remo had its own parliament, and it turned us out and confiscated everything. Of course we came back. We always do come back. That time it took us one hundred and fifty years; but the government—it was Genoa that ruled the town then—suppressed our order and pillaged us once more. Of course we returned again, and twice in the last century they have kicked us out."

The *padre* seemed to be fond of that ugly

phrase. He repeated it with a kind of bitter relish.

"When we got back the last time," he went on, "the buildings were rotting to ruin, and the garden was devastated—democracy had pastured its mules there. I bought it from the city. You see—now it blooms again. The trees and vines give fruit. I have made the falling houses strong and new once more—roofs to shelter men. Some day, sooner or later, it will be given up to desolation once more. The houses will swarm with vermin—the rats of revolution will caper in them. The walls will crumble. The trees will die. There will be neither fruit nor flowers. Just such a ruin has followed every confiscation; and so it shall be."

"Until you come again," Forbess said.

"We always come again," the *padre* answered. He stood up, lean and erect. "Always we come again. And they? They die and are laid in the earth. It fills their mouths and their nostrils, and penetrates and absorbs them; and when we come again, this"—he stamped on the blue marl of the garden walk—"is all that is left of them."

His gesture was impressive. The old man in the dingy cassock was timeless as a prophecy; and Forbess began to understand that he was a priest precisely as a lion is a lion and an earthquake is an earthquake, because it is absolutely indispensable to be what destiny decrees, and to be nothing else. Even destiny, the young man thought, must have been hard put to it now and then to keep this fiery old swashbuckler bundled up in a black gown. He watched him striding up and down—still prophesying, it may be.

"*Padre*," he called out suddenly, "who is that down there?"

The little limping fellow whom he had seen before was peering at him from the shelter of a rose bush with those strange cavernous eyes, fixed, disquieting.

"That," said the *padre*, "is Beppo. Beppo is a sort of gardener. Lucrezia brought him to me. He is her nephew, or cousin, or something—you can't tell much about these hill people. They are Ligurians, you know—pagans," he added, resuming his seat on the bench. "They are a queer race up there. They live in their ruined stone cities like wild things in caves—a queer race, some Aryan fragment marooned in the barren hills, living on, un-

touched by modern things. Why, it is only in my time that a road was driven through to them and fluttered some of them out into the open. I should like to take you up into that world. I often go."

"What takes you up there, *padre*?"

The old man chuckled. It was a way he had of preparing for a statement that might bear heavy on credulity.

"I do duty up there, quite often," he explained.

"Yes?"

"As exorcist."

"What's that, *padre*?"

"There are devils up in those hills, and the peasants are harried by them. Don't laugh too soon. One never knows what is going on up there. They are doing things their ancestors did. They pour magic drink to propitiate evil spirits. They light fires to old, forgotten white gods—even in these days, and within sight of the Madonna of Lampedusa. If they call the devil, why shouldn't he come? I've seen strange things in the Ligurian hills, and strange people."

"And that's where your gardener came from?"

"Beppo? He is one of them. It's for Lucrezia's sake I took him on. She seems to think he has a soul worth saving."

"From what I've seen of him," the young man remarked lightly, "he is not quite the gift I should think of offering to Omnipotence!"

"It is easy to jest about that poor wretch," the *padre* replied gravely; "but I think it might be better for us to leave the question of his soul to the mercy of God."

"I'm sorry, *padre*—I meant nothing. There's something about the fellow—"

"Yes, there is something about the fellow," the *padre* agreed. "Do you know what it is? It's the shadow of those rocky hills, where they still light fires to strange gods. Did you see his dog?"

"I saw a little dog."

"A sad little red dog? He never whistles for his dog, never calls it, yet it is always at his heels, listening. The dog is as queer as he is. When they think they are alone, mark you—I've heard them at it—they talk to each other in a language they both understand—a sort of cooing, half muted whine, rising and falling. I don't trust that dog."

"And Beppo?"

The *padre* had been speaking in a low tone, but suddenly he raised his voice.

"Beppo is a good lad," he remarked, brightly. "I have faith in humanity, and some in Beppo."

Footsteps sounded on the path above.

"Lucrezia?"

"Yes, it must have been Lucrezia. She was listening."

"But could she understand?"

"Dear son, when an old woman listens she always understands."

"But English?"

"What would the language matter? Lucrezia, too, comes from the hills. Anyway"—he repeated his words in a half whisper—"old women, when they listen, always understand. It is a terrible gift. I think it is given them in compensation for all they have had to suffer when they were young."

He was silent for a while.

"Lucrezia," he said at length, "will give you a dinner worth while if you dine here to-night. You will be alone. You don't mind?"

"It is what I came for—to be alone."

"Yes—to lean up against yourself. I understand. Lean against yourself and get steady. I shall be yonder in the house, if you want me; but you have yourself to lean on, eh?"

"Yes," the young man answered, "myself, and the day, and the night, and a pipe, and you, *padre*, if I need you."

"Aye," said the *padre*; "and don't forget the flask of Apricale wine I sent over. There are books, too—books, and always books; and overhead is the ancient mercy of God, who understands the hearts of all men. You'll be all right, Hugh!"

"I shall be all right."

They said good-by, and the *padre* went over to the house.

Forbess spent most of the day alone by the sea. It was nightfall when he returned to the chalet. A fire of pine cones and olive logs was blazing on the hearth. Half a dozen old brass lamps, with wicks burning in tiny cups filled with olive oil, gave light. There were rugs on the stone floor, and on the whitewashed wall a faded Madonna in a wooden frame.

This was the principal room. From it opened a kitchen, with stairs going down to a cellar. Above, there were only the square bedroom and two lesser rooms fitted as dressing room and bath.



Lucrezia had laid the little table near the fireplace and set out his simple meal—the soup and fowl and salad, the cheese and fruit, and the flask of Apricale. He thanked her. It was all he wanted.

"Here are the keys, *signore*," she said, "if you want to lock the door after me."

"There is only this door, isn't there—the one to the garden?"

"Yes—there is no other way out or in."

"I remember. The *padre* told me so last night."

When she had gone, he closed the heavy door behind her, and locked it. For a long while he sat by the fire, with his thoughts.

He was not the first man who had lost the woman that he wanted of all the world. He must pull himself out of the pit. There was really no use hiding like a wounded animal; he would get back to his own kind of life. There was always the yacht. If he couldn't forget her—but he knew perfectly well he couldn't forget her. Her image would steal after him through the water, peering up at him from the flying foam, calling to him, holding him.

Since he knew she had given her love to another man, he was glad, above all things, that he had not spoken to her of his own love. He would only have troubled her and thrown a shadow on her happiness.

After all, what did he want most—her happiness, or his own? He knew that in the end he would have to admit that what he wanted most was her happiness. It would come to that in the end—when his own pain died down a little.

How long he sat there he did not know. The oil lamps were flickering down. It was very quiet. There were no longer any sounds, of either hoofs or feet, in the lane that ran behind the chalet. Only an old log crackled on the hearth.

Upon the young man sitting there long-neglected sleep began to fall, lightly, cloudily—less sleep than the shadow of sleep. He dared not move for fear he might frighten it away. He waited, hoping it would envelop him, shroud him in forgetfulness, that he might not think of her.

One of the lamps was still alive, pouring dull yellow light from its three tiny bowls. How good the silence was! He let himself sink into it.

Then, suddenly, the night, the silence, his world of dreams, seemed to be torn and riven by a wild outcry—a cry of savage

horror, stifled, but fierce—that dragged him to his feet.

"In the room!" he exclaimed. "It was in the room!"

Save for himself the room was empty—save for himself and his shadow moving on the whitewashed walls.

Again the silence.

"It was here—in the room—beside me—under my feet!"

He picked up the lamp and went into the kitchen. Nothing!

He looked down the dark staircase to the cellar. There was a door, but he could not open it until he had drawn the heavy oak bar and turned the key in the lock.

He pulled the door toward him, and entered the cellar. It was a stone cave, with stone floor and stone walls, old as time, with no apparent outlet save a barred window high in the wall and a small door opening on the terrace. Both door and window were securely locked. In one corner of the cellar lay the pine cones for his fire, in another the logs of olive wood. Empty flasks, broken, dust-defiled, littered the floor. That was all.

"It is empty," he said, "as my naked hand!"

Returning the way he had come, he mounted the stairs to the kitchen and bolted the door behind him. Nothing had changed in that room, nor in the living room beyond, where he had been sitting by the fire. Both were empty and utterly silent.

He opened the front door which gave on the terrace. A little puff of wind extinguished his lamp. Gradually his eyes accustomed themselves to the night. He saw something moving in the darkness. It came from the corner of the chalet at his left, and, as he crossed the terrace, it was outlined for an instant against the sky. He thought he knew that figure of a man, with hunched shoulders and limping feet.

"Hey, Beppo!" he shouted.

The figure dipped below the sky line and was gone, as a shadow goes.

What was it, he asked himself, this cry in the night? Something more horrible than fear had screamed aloud—what terror in the night? And this dark little man slinking about the locked and silent house?

For a long time Forbess stood, listening, watching, before he went back to the dying fire.

(To be continued in the November number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)



# The Matchmaker

THE STRANGE RESULT OF RALPH HASTINGS'S PLAN TO MARRY  
OFF GALE FOSTER TO ANOTHER MAN

By William Slavens McNutt

**G**ALE FOSTER sat alone on the end of the dock, and sneered.

"Sissy!" she muttered, fitting her back against the cool surface of a huge wet pile, and relaxing with the beautiful, comfortable abandon possible to a completely healthy fifteen-year-old girl in a boy's bathing suit. "Sissy! Booby! Can't even swim! Yah!"

She was watching a boy in a canoe some thirty yards from the end of the dock, and carefully pretending to be unaware of his presence. The boy's name was Ralph Hastings. He was about Gale's age, and lived next door to her.

Nature had been in either a careless or a comical mood while shaping him. He was all feet and hands and head. You could look at him from behind and know that he wore spectacles. All tall, scrawny-necked, bony-shouldered boys who look like that from behind wear spectacles. You could look at him from any angle and know that he was a precocious bookworm, that he was neither a seal in the water nor a lion on land, that no ordinary boy of his age could lack for laughter when he was about, and that no girl of Gale Foster's appearance, age, and character could possibly avoid actively despising and detesting him.

Gale, be it known, could hold her own with any neighborhood boy of her age at swimming, tennis, golf, or horseback riding. She was strong and tireless and physically skillful, and she heartily and openly despised those who were easily fatigued and physically inept.

And so she sat on the dock and sneered, as she watched Ralph manipulate his frail craft with the clumsy overcaution which is ever more dangerous than confident recklessness. She saw the spent wave from the

wake of a distant passing steamer before he did, and saw that if he did not shift his course it would catch him broadside on and probably upset him. She saw this, and a grin of anticipatory delight replaced the sneer on her face.

She giggled when Ralph noticed the swell almost upon him, and struggled frantically to head his canoe into it. The combination of the swell and the boy's bungling attempt to keep the canoe on an even keel did the business, and over he went.

Quick as the upset was, the boy was scarcely under water when Gale Foster dived from the dock to rescue him. To reach him, she had to swim thirty yards and then dive twice. In spite of his frantic struggles, she managed to tow him to within a few yards of the float before help arrived.

Denny Shevlin, Gale's bachelor uncle, was first on the scene. He promptly plunged in and managed to drag the two young people to the float, where excited friends and relatives waited to pull them from the water.

Ralph was unconscious. Gale, while too weak to stand, still had sufficient vitality left to express emotion. Her elders, bending solicitously above her as she lay panting, gradually became aware that nothing ailed the child but exhaustion and anger. While they petted her and tried to soothe her, she writhed and sputtered like an angry cat.

Her vocal powers and the strength to stand unaided on her sturdy limbs returned to her at about the same moment that Ralph Hastings returned to consciousness. Gale arose indignantly, shook off those who attempted to assist her, and strode across the dock to where Ralph lay on his back,

with his head in his weeping mother's lap, trying to collect his scattered wits and to determine what all the excitement was about.

"Oh, Gale!" Ralph's mother cried out. "You saved him! You saved my boy! How can I ever thank you? How can I ever—"

"Oh, shut up!" Gale said rudely. "Shut up! Shut up!"

She stood, her bare legs spread, her arms akimbo on her slender hips, looking, in her wet bathing suit, and with her severely bobbed yellow hair, like a sturdy, defiant boy.

"You booby!" she spat out at Ralph. "You big silly cry baby, you! Now see what you went and pretty nearly did! You pretty nearly got us both drowned—that's what you did! A great big boy like you that can't swim! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, making me jump in the water and pull you out and pretty nearly get drowned myself doing it? I ought to have let you stayed there and drown—that's what I ought to have done. You great big booby, you! I'm ashamed of you—that's what I am! I'm ashamed that I live on the same street where your house is. I'm ashamed that I live in the same town where you do!"

"Why, Gale!" Ralph's mother exclaimed protestingly.

"Aw, shucks!" said Gale.

"Now, Gale!" said Mrs. Foster, in a tone of reproof.

"Oh, darn!" said Gale.

"Now listen, Gale," said her uncle. "You mustn't—"

"Oh, damn!" said Gale explosively, and dived back into the Sound.

"Gale! Come back here!" her uncle called apprehensively, as she came to the surface.

She did not answer him. She did not answer any of the rest who called excitedly to her. Her wind recovered, she swam smoothly out to the diving float, pulled herself upon it, and sat there sulking, dabbling her feet and legs in the water, and paying no apparent heed to the adult commotion ashore.

Ralph Hastings stood up on trembling legs and looked miserably across the water at the scornful heroine who had saved his life.

"Dog-gone it!" he muttered. "What did she have to go and do it for? Now I

got to thank her and everything! Dog-gone it! I'd just about as soon have been drowned!"

## II

WITH shock and exhaustion as excuses, Ralph Hastings stayed in bed for three days, and thus staved off the inevitable humiliating moment when he must meet and thank Gale Foster, and must listen to the tirade of abuse which he felt certain would be his portion.

While he lay thus, enjoying his reprieve as best he might, a horrible thought occurred to him. In a panic, he called his mother and questioned her.

"Ma, tell me something," he demanded anxiously. "If—if a girl, now, was to save a fellow's life some way or another, would it be just the same as if a fellow saved a girl's life, or would it be different? It would be different, wouldn't it? I mean it wouldn't be just the same, would it? I mean it would be some different, wouldn't it, anyhow? Wouldn't it, ma?"

"What in the world are you getting at, Ralph?" his mother asked.

"Well, now, I've read in stories where fellows saved girls' lives," Ralph explained; "and always, the way I read 'em, the girl kind of had to marry the fellow because he did it. It wouldn't be like that if it was the other way around, would it?"

Mrs. Hastings laughed.

"Ralph, are you worried for fear that you'll have to marry Gale Foster when she grows up?"

Ralph blushed.

"Well, maybe I was thinking about that, in a way," he admitted. "Of course, she wouldn't want to marry me, anyhow. She hates me. She always did hate me; but what I mean is, do I have to ask her to marry me, or anything like that?"

"Don't be silly!" his mother said. "Of course not!"

Ralph gave a sigh of relief.

"I just wanted to know," he said. "I got to thinking about it. I didn't know whether I had to or not. Gosh, I'd hate to have to do that! I'd do 'most anything for Gale, in a way. I always kind of liked her. I'd like her quite a lot, I guess, if she wouldn't pester me so much; but I tell you, mother, I wouldn't want to ask her to marry me!"

"You're too young to fret yourself about such things," Mrs. Hastings reproved him.

Ralph shook his head solemnly.

"No, I'm not, ma," he contradicted her. "I know I'm too young to get married, but I'm old enough to bother my head about it. You'd be surprised, I guess, to know how much I bother about it. You see, I don't want to get married, ever, because I don't like girls much, and girls don't like me at all; but I worry a lot for fear some time something will happen, and I will. I hope I don't, ma! Some fellows don't, do they? Gale's uncle, Mr. Shevlin, never did, did he? If he never did, maybe I can get along without doing it."

"Silly!" said Mrs. Hastings.

"Anyhow, I'm glad I don't have to ask Gale to marry me when she grows up," Ralph went on, somewhat relieved; "but I've got to go thank her for saving my life, pretty soon," he added lugubriously. "She'll give me fits because I don't know how to swim."

He met Gale the next afternoon, while she was severely busy in her own back yard, baking tiny pies on a tiny stove in a miniature tent. She lived up to the limit of his expectations.

"You needn't thank me for saving your old life," she said, puttering busily with her work all the while. "If I'd stopped to think, I guess I wouldn't have done it. You're no good to anybody. You just lay around all the time, and don't do anything. All you do is just be a sissy. I know lots of girls in this town who ain't as much like girls as you are. The idea of a big boy like you that can't swim!"

"I'll learn to swim, if you want me to, Gale," Ralph promised humbly.

"I don't care if you learn to swim or not," Gale said. "You can lay around and read all the time, and get drowned some time, for all I care!"

"Anyhow, I'm awfully obliged to you for saving my life," Ralph said. "I'd like to do something for you, if I could."

Gale laughed and shook her head.

"You can't do anything for me," she said decisively.

Ralph hesitated and reddened.

"You know, if you—if you wanted me to, I'd—I'd wait and marry you when you grow up," he said.

Gale Foster straightened and stared at him. The boy recoiled from her expression even before she spoke.

"Marry me!" she stormed at him. "Marry me, you cry baby! You big

sissy! You big booby, you! Marry me! I'm sorry I didn't let you stay in the water and drown. You go on home, and don't you come back here any more, either. Go on, now! You get out of my yard and stay out! You—you make me mad all the time. Every time I see you, you make me so mad I could pick up something and hit you. Get out of my yard and stay out, and don't talk to me!"

Ralph retreated, shambling, dejected, and sat for a time hunched up on the back porch of his house, watching Gale out of the corner of his eye, while she busied herself with her baking. There was an ache in his heart, which, curiously enough, was not caused by any wound to his own vanity. He was inexplicably sorry for Gale Foster.

"I wish I could do something for her!" he said to himself at length, with a sigh. "I would if I could. I bet I could, too, if she'd let me!"

He sighed again, sought out a book, and sank to awkward rest in the hammock.

"Sissy!" Gale Foster said viciously under her breath, as she watched him furtively. "Booby! Great big cry baby! I'm ashamed I know him!"

### III

HAVING ONCE seen the fifteen-year-old Ralph Hastings lying in his hammock and reading a book, you would have had no difficulty in recognizing the man he had become in the thirty-year-old Ralph Hastings who sat sprawled in a big wicker chair on the broad veranda of the Green Stream Country Club. He was longer and lankier than he had been as a boy, and, if anything, more interestingly ugly. Heavy horn-rimmed glasses bestrode his bony nose, and a book lay open on his lap.

As he sat thus, relaxed, dreamily staring out over the sunlit course, Gale Foster came briskly from the hall with a bag of clubs slung over her shoulder. She was a beautiful woman, and yet not an attractive one. Her loveliness repelled rather than allured. It bade the beholder stand and admire, but did not invite.

She stopped for a moment and looked at Ralph Hastings sprawling in his chair. There was a cold hostility in her blue eyes.

"Not playing this afternoon, I suppose?" she asked, with an edge of contempt in her tone.

Ralph blinked.

"No," he admitted guiltily. "I've got

this book to do by Thursday, and I haven't read it yet. I thought I'd sit here and—"

"You would!" she said with emphasis, and strode away to the first tee.

Denny Shevlin, white-haired now, and with a bit of a paunch, arrived in the doorway in time to overhear the conversation. Shrugging, he dropped into a chair beside Ralph.

"Still riding you, eh?" he said.

Ralph nodded.

"She always did," he said. He smiled ruefully. "You should have heard what she said to me when I went into the Red Cross, in 1917. Ouch! To hear her talk, you'd think I hadn't tried to enlist. She gave me such a merciless scorching that I went back and tried again in half a dozen different places. Not a chance, of course! My eyes, you know—at least, they were the worst. Lord knows there were plenty of other things wrong—heart and feet and weight and this and that. After I'd failed all over again, I came back and told her how I'd tried. She gave me a worse lambasting than before. She took up my life from the beginning, and explained in painful detail that I'd been a slacker from boyhood, that my inability to get into the army was just due to the lazy, useless life I'd led. She's right, of course, but I never could get interested in games, somehow. I don't know why. Knocking some kind of a ball from here to there and back always seemed silly to me."

"What a soldier Gale would have made, if only she'd been a boy!" Denny Shevlin exclaimed.

"Wouldn't she just?" said Ralph. "As it was, she made a great record for herself in the Red Cross. She did great work down in the Balkans, and over in Armenia after the armistice. She did a darned sight better than I could have done, even if I'd had the chance. I got stuck right there in Paris for the duration. Lucky for me, I suppose. I'd probably have got the croup, and died, if they'd sent me out any place where I'd have had to undergo hardships of any sort."

Denny Shevlin looked at the young man curiously.

"What are you doing with yourself now?" he asked.

Ralph shrugged.

"Oh, book reviewing, mostly—same thing that I did before the war. I wasn't much good as a reporter, you know."

"Doing any writing of your own?" Shevlin asked.

Ralph nodded.

"Working on a novel. Probably no good. I had one published last year, but it didn't get anywhere. Some of the critics liked it, but no sale to speak of."

"Lucky for you you're independent," Shevlin said. "If you didn't have an income—"

Ralph laughed.

"I'd be a terrible thing, wouldn't I? I don't suppose I could make more than enough to just barely keep alive. Thank God, I don't have to!"

"I guess Gale is making quite a pot of money these days, one way and another," Shevlin said.

"Sure is," said Ralph enthusiastically. "She's a wonder! That restaurant and tea room of hers, down in the village, is making her all kinds of a profit, and she's got it organized now so that she doesn't have to give much of her own time to it. Then those grotesque little figures she does are selling like hot cakes in the gift shops all over the country. She's dragging down big royalties from them. Lord knows what else she's into. I think that book of hers, 'The Red Cross in the Near East,' made some money. Darned well written, too—full of color and punch. She's a wonder!"

"She is," Shevlin agreed; "and yet I think she's one of the unhappiest women I know."

Ralph Hastings sat up with a start and looked at Mr. Shevlin.

"You think that really?" he inquired earnestly.

"I do," replied Shevlin firmly.

Ralph drew a long breath and held out his hand.

"Shake!" he said. "You've got sense. I didn't think anybody but me knew that. I don't believe Gale knows it herself. You could get a hearty laugh, any time, telling Gale's friends she isn't happy; but she isn't. I know it, and now you say you know it. What's the matter with her?"

"Man," said Shevlin shortly.

"Man!" Ralph repeated, staring. "Why—why, good Lord! I didn't know Gale ever had a love affair."

"She never did," said Shevlin.

"But you said—"

"I was too brief for clarity. What I mean is that she needs a man to love."

"But good Lord, man!" Ralph said.



"She doesn't want anything to do with men, except to beat them at golf or tennis or swimming. There are scores of fellows who would give her a rush if she didn't freeze them before they got started. Naturally, you never tried to make love to Gale. Neither did I, as far as that goes; but I know some who have. Believe me, none of them tried it twice."

"The right man wouldn't have to try at all," said Shevlin. "She'd take one look at him, and grab and hang on. The trouble with Gale is that she's a superwoman. None of the ordinary run of runts make any appeal to her. She's a superwoman, and she'll stay single and loveless and increasingly unhappy until she meets a superman who is fit to mate with her. Then, my boy, you'll see a match!"

"I bet you're right," Ralph said solemnly. "Yes, sir, I'll bet you're right. I never thought of it that way before. That's what's the matter with her, sure!" He sat up suddenly and slapped his knee. "By George!" he exclaimed. "I believe I've got it!"

Shevlin looked at him.

"The pip?" he inquired.

"Probably," Ralph admitted; "but that's incidental. See here, Mr. Shevlin, you think a lot of Gale, don't you? You'd do a lot for her?"

"I take pride in my reputation for probity," said Shevlin, "but I used to lie for her like a Turk when she was a little girl. I'd do as much for her now, and probably more. Why?"

"I feel the same way about her," Ralph said earnestly. "I always liked Gale. I don't know why. Lord knows she never furnished me with a legitimate reason; but I always have. You know she saved my life once."

Shevlin chuckled.

"I remember," he said. "I was there. She pulled you out of the water, and then called you everything that a well bred girl of her years could be expected to know. I think she'd probably have tossed you back in, if some of us hadn't been there to stop her."

Ralph nodded.

"She's always been that way with me. Stopped just now and withered me with a look because I was going to read a book this afternoon, instead of playing a round. I don't mind, somehow. I'm used to her. I would like to help her, Mr. Shevlin. I'd

like to do something for Gale, and I believe I can!"

"Shoot!" said Denny Shevlin.

"Did you ever hear of Kirk Morgan?"

Old Mr. Shevlin thought for a moment, and shook his head hesitantly.

"Name sounds familiar, but I don't place it."

"He's a superman, if there ever was one," Ralph said enthusiastically. "He's got more money than any law ought to allow. He's so good-looking that all men under ninety-seven hate him on sight. He's an athlete, a sportsman, and a scholar."

"I get you," said Mr. Shevlin. "He headed some kind of an expedition into the arctic some years ago, didn't he?"

"Right!" said Ralph. "Hunting and taking pictures. Afterward he did the same thing in Africa and India. Then in 1914, when the war broke out, he—"

"I know," said Shevlin. "Enlisted with the French, didn't he?"

"Air service—that's him. In 1916 he was shot down behind the German lines, and taken prisoner."

"Sure! He escaped, too, didn't he?"

"That's him," said Ralph. "Got back to the United States and went into our air service as soon as we got into it. He was one of our aces, and after the armistice, when he was demobilized, he fought with the Poles for a while. A regular fighting fool!"

"Yes," said Shevlin. "What of it?"

"I know him well," Ralph said.

"That may mean something to you," Shevlin said. "It may warm the cockles of your heart and stir you to your immortal depths, but somehow it leaves me cold. My question still stands."

"I roomed with him for a year at college," Ralph went on, "and I saw a good deal of him in Paris during the war. We're really very good friends. Don't you see? I could get him!"

"Ramble on," said Shevlin. "There's no sense in your conversation, but it's cool and comfortable on the veranda, and I can doze while you talk. You won't mind, will you? I'll understand you just as well asleep as awake."

"Don't you see?" cried Ralph, beginning to wax indignant. "I could get him for Gale!"

Old Mr. Shevlin sat up with a start.

"Good God!" he said explosively.

"What's the matter?" inquired Ralph, in some surprise.

"Probably nothing," said Mr. Shevlin. "The thing sounded a bit raw, the way you put it. Get him for Gale, indeed! I gather that you're speaking of the man as my niece's prospective husband. It sounded as if you were talking of getting a wrist watch for her, or a new riding horse, or something of that sort."

"I think it's a peach of an idea," said Ralph. "I'll swear I do. They're a lot alike in many ways. Gale's a superwoman, the ordinary sort of fellows don't attract her, and so she's lonesome and unhappy. Same way with Kirk. No ladies' man at all. Don't think he ever had a real affair. Bring the two together, and what happens? Why, it's inevitable. They were made for each other. It'll be an absolutely perfect match!"

Shevlin rose.

"Young man," he said solemnly, "some people squint down the muzzles of guns to see if they're loaded. There are others who play the rôle of matchmaker. I don't want to dampen your enthusiasm, but I'll make you a little bet that the angel in the celestial department that keeps the list of mortal fools doesn't write the names of the firearm idiots in the very highest class. That's reserved for the saps who go about with malice aforethought to cause the meeting of a certain man and a certain woman side by side at an altar, with a sky pilot at the apex of the triangle. Don't let these remarks discourage you, my son. They are no doubt the senile driveling of a doddering old man, far gone in his dotage; but, such as they are, I offer them to you."

"Just the same," said Ralph stubbornly, as old Mr. Shevlin moved away, "I think I'll send for Kirk, and have him come and visit me here for a while."

"By all means," said Shevlin, looking back over his shoulder as he paused in the doorway. "The great successes in this mad old world have always been made by brave fools who were deaf to words of wisdom, and who rushed in where cautious angels of the Safety First Brigade feared to tread. Hop to it, son, and God's blessing be upon you. You'll probably need it!"

#### IV

TEN days later, Kirk Morgan arrived. He immediately proceeded to prove that Ralph Hastings was a shrewd judge of

those qualities of character that spring from the heart.

On the second day after his arrival, he was seated on the veranda of the Green Stream Country Club, with Ralph, when Gale Foster passed across the lawn on her way to the first tee. Kirk sat erect, as if some one had prodded him between the shoulders with a sharp pin.

"What's the matter?" Ralph asked.

"Who's that?" Kirk asked tensely, indicating Gale.

Ralph's heart beat fast.

"Why?" he asked.

"What a woman!" Kirk exclaimed. "Good Lord, what a woman! Who is she?"

"Oh, she's one of the gang around here," Ralph said, carefully casual. "Gale Foster. Lives right next door to us. She and I were kids together."

"Married?"

"No."

Kirk rose.

"I want to meet her," he said shortly.

"Sure!" said Ralph. "We're going to be around all afternoon. I'll keep an eye out for her, and I'll introduce you when she comes in."

Kirk shook impatiently.

"No," he said. "Now!"

"But she's starting out to play," Ralph objected. "She's going around with young Hotchkiss. She's meeting him there at the tee now. I can't very well march you down there and stop their game and—"

"Damn all that!" said Kirk Morgan emphatically. "I've waited thirty-four years to meet that woman, and I'm not going to wait any longer. Come on—shake a leg! Take me down there and introduce me."

Ralph rose from his chair with a pretense of reluctance.

"All right, Kirk," he said. "If you want to eat pie with your knife in public, I'll set the table for you."

Gale had already driven off when Ralph and Kirk reached the first tee. Young Hotchkiss had teed up his ball, and was dusting off his hands preparatory to gripping his club for the drive. He turned and frowned as Ralph intruded himself.

"Gale, I want you to meet Kirk Morgan," Ralph said abruptly.

Gale looked at the tall, lithe, black-haired, sunburned explorer, and a warm glow showed in her light blue eyes.

"You're the Kirk Morgan who wrote

'Big Game Shooting in Central Africa,' aren't you?" she said, with a note of reverence in her voice. She held out her hand impulsively. "I read that book through four times. That was a book!"

"I'm not a writing man," replied Kirk, holding her hand in his. "The words of a book come out of me like stubborn teeth from a sore jaw; but I'd have been willing to write that four times over to hear you say you liked it."

Gale flushed.

"That's a nice bit of flattery," she said, "but just a little bit too rich to be true."

"I mean it," Kirk asserted earnestly. "You're the sort of person I wrote that book for. When I finished, I was sure the effort was wasted, because, you see, I didn't think there was any such person."

Gale's laugh was light, but the flush on her face was deep, and a pleasant confusion of spirit was in her eyes.

"Words for conversation are not as difficult for you as words for a book, I take it," she said.

"With the perfect inspiration, words come easy for any purpose," he replied.

There was a slight pause. The two stood looking intently at each other. Gale apparently became aware, for the first time, that he was still holding her hand. The color in her face grew yet more vivid as she withdrew it.

"I have always wanted to hear more of the story of that lion that rushed you," she said, recovering herself. "You gave just enough detail in your book to make me curious to hear the rest. Will you tell me about it—all about it?"

"When?" said Morgan, with a challenge in his voice.

"Now," replied Gale, taking up the gauge without hesitation.

She laid her hand on his arm, and they moved away together toward the clubhouse, without explanations or apologies, talking earnestly in low tones.

Young Hotchkiss threw down his driver and stared after them.

"I'll be damned!" he exclaimed. "Of all the nerve! Of all the double-dyed, bred in the wool, one-thousand-and-one-per-cent nerve!"

"I knew it!" Ralph said ecstatically, looking after the engrossed pair.

Hotchkiss turned and scowled at him.

"You brought that animated collar advertisement down here," he said. "You're

responsible. Just for that, you go dig up your clubs, come on down here, and play a round with me for five dollars a hole. You know what that will cost you, don't you?"

"Five times eighteen is ninety," said Ralph. "It's cheap at the price. Just a minute till I get my clubs. I'll be right back!"

## V

"I GUESS you win," said old Mr. Shevlin grudgingly, as he sat on the clubhouse veranda with Ralph Hastings and watched the mounted figures of Kirk Morgan and Gale Foster disappear at a hard gallop over a distant hill. "It's not often any one can pick a man and a woman out of the mess of the world, and predict that they'll match like two pieces of wood in a well made piece of furniture, and have his prophecy come true; but you certainly did it, son. Looks that way, anyhow. I guess you win!"

"I guess I do," said Ralph moodily and without enthusiasm. "Why don't they announce their engagement and be done with it?"

"Good Lord, son!" replied Shevlin. "They haven't been acquainted long enough yet to remember each other's names without stopping to think."

"It's been a month," Ralph said irritably, "and they've been together every day in all that time. They ride together, and golf together, and play tennis together, and go swimming together. Holy mackerel, they make me sick!"

"Why, son!" Shevlin exclaimed. "What ails you? Can't you see that your plan is working perfectly?"

"I didn't plan to make a pair of hazy-minded, moon-eyed idiots out of my two good friends," Ralph said. "I suppose they'll get over it after they get married. Hope so, anyway. Hate to think they'd go through the rest of their lives struck silly, like a pair of mushy high school kids having a bad case of puppy love fever."

Shevlin eyed the boy curiously.

"Son," he said gently, "you remember what I told you when you suggested inviting this fellow Kirk Morgan here to meet Gale?"

"Not exactly," Ralph grumbled.

"Neither do I, exactly," said Shevlin; "but the general idea of my remarks was that you were in process of loading your

mind down with considerably more trouble than it would be able to carry. It seems to me as if it was beginning to sit overly heavy right now."

"What do you mean?" Ralph blustered. "Why should I care? What is it to me, hey? Tell me that!"

"I don't know if I can," said Shevlin; "but I'll make a guess if you insist on it. Shall I?"

Ralph fidgeted in his chair, blushed, and rose abruptly.

"Oh, hell!" he said viciously, and walked away.

"Jealous!" said Shevlin to himself. "Why, the poor sucker! In love with Gale himself, and he didn't know it! Had to import a rival to beat him out before he discovered it! Hi hum!" he sighed, and called to a passing waiter to bring him a pot of tea.

"George," he said to the waiter, as the latter arranged the things on the table, "you wouldn't throw dynamite into a kitchen stove, would you?"

"No, sah," said the waiter, grinning.

"No, sah! No, indeedy!"

"Don't bet on that," Shevlin warned him solemnly. "Wiser men than you do worse."

## VI

ON the following morning Ralph Hastings sat on a stringpiece of the float at the end of the little community dock, gloomily watching the play of gleaming shoulders as Kirk Morgan and Gale Foster sprinted through the water for the last two hundred yards of a two-mile swim.

Ralph was not in his bathing suit. He seldom was. To him water was a sanitary rather than a sporting proposition, and he took his in the bathtub. Old Mr. Shevlin sat near by, dressed for swimming, dabbling his fat pink toes in the water.

"A perfect pair!" he murmured, watching the two swimmers.

"Yes," said Ralph, without enthusiasm. "I bet I could have learned to swim if I'd tried!" he added combatively.

"Probably," said Mr. Shevlin.

"I'll bet I could even now," Ralph went on solemnly. "It can't be so much of a trick. Look at all the pinheads that can do it!"

"Millions of pinheads can read," Mr. Shevlin said; "but nevertheless it must be awkward not to be able to, eh?"

Kirk Morgan and Gale raced furiously for the last few yards, coming on in a wild whirl of spray. They climbed, laughing and panting, upon the float.

"What a pleasure to swim with one who can swim!" said Kirk.

"The same to you, sir," Gale returned, dimpling.

"Any good dog could outswim both of you," observed Ralph sullenly.

"Hello!" said Kirk. "Indigestion this bright morning?"

"Sour grapes," said Gale, frowning at Ralph.

Kirk laughed.

"There ought to be a law compelling people to learn how to take care of themselves in the water," he said.

"Take more than a law to do him any good," said Gale.

Kirk rose, grinning mischievously.

"You don't suppose he's been kidding us all these years, do you? Maybe he can swim and won't admit it. Let's chuck him in and find out!"

He stooped suddenly, and picked Ralph up easily in his big arms.

"In you go, old top!" he cried gayly.

"We'll find out about you. Sink, swim, or be fished out!"

A spasm of fury suddenly twisted Ralph Hastings's face into a grotesque mask of fury. He fairly screamed an oath, and struck the mighty Kirk Morgan full in the right eye with his clenched fist.

Kirk gave an exclamation of amazement, dropped him to the float, and stepped back; but he was not thus easily free of the young man who had suddenly gone mad in his arms. Ralph Hastings dropped and hit the float fighting. He charged at Kirk, mouthing unintelligibly, and striking out wildly with revolving fists.

Kirk grabbed him and held him tight.

"Here, you!" he said angrily. "What do you think you're doing? Come on now—cut this out!"

An escaped fist jabbing him on the chin was his answer.

Kirk gave a growl of rage and used his strength. He bent Ralph down, and caught him firmly by his belt and the collar of his jacket.

"All right, you crazy young spitfire!" he said. "You're hot, are you? Well, we'll see if this will cool you off!"

Thus saying, he heaved his erstwhile friend off the float.



Gale Foster leaped to her feet, her face white.

"Kirk!" she cried out. "He can't swim a stroke!"

"I know it," Kirk growled. "I'll get him."

He dived and came up just as Ralph Hastings rose to the surface, sputtering and struggling frantically.

"Easy, now!" said Kirk, grabbing him. "Just keep still, and I'll get you ashore all right. Don't get scared, and don't struggle."

There was nothing in Ralph's immediate subsequent action to indicate that he was scared, and it must be said that he struggled—struggled with an insane fury to do as much damage as possible to Kirk's face. He grabbed Morgan by the hair with one hand and hammered his features furiously with the other, spitting out epithets and salt water, until they both sank beneath the surface.

Ralph was far spent when they came up again, and about one-third drowned, but he was still doing his instinctive bit at the job of working over Morgan's face.

"You fool!" Morgan raged at him. "All right! If you will have it, here it is for you!"

He lunged out with his big right fist and clipped Ralph smartly on the jaw. As he did so, a perfect hail of small, sharp fists and elbows beat upon his face. They were the fists and elbows of Gale Foster. After doing her unexpected bit in completion of the work Ralph had begun on Morgan's features, she dived for the sinking man.

As she came to the surface with him and started for the float, swimming on her back and towing him, his head resting on her breast, Kirk Morgan swam to help her. She warned him away with a vocal ferocity that stung like blows from a whip.

"Gale!" Kirk exclaimed, swimming after her. "I had to hit him! I had to knock him out! He'd have had us both drowned!"

"You beast!" Gale raged at him, as she reached the float, clambered out, and drew Ralph up after her without apparent effort. "You coward! You bully! Don't speak to me! Don't ever speak to me! Don't you dare!"

She fell to working feverishly over Ralph.

"Oh, my dear!" she crooned to him. "My poor dear! Ralph! Oh, honey boy, are you badly hurt?"

Ralph Hastings coughed and choked, spat out some sea water, swallowed some more, and sat up.

"You get away from me!" he cried at Gale, in as loud a voice as he could muster. "You've been bothering me all my life, and I'm sick of it! You go away from me and let me alone! You know I love you, damn you!"

"Ralph!" Gale exclaimed.

"Don't Ralph me!" he raged. "You heard what I said. 'Damn you!' I said, and I meant it, too! Just because I love you, you needn't think you can go on bothering me all the time. I'm through. You get away from me and stay away!"

"Ralph!" Gale said desperately, grabbing his wet, bedraggled head to her breast. "Don't talk to me that way—don't!"

"I will!" Ralph said in a smothered voice, struggling ineffectually to release himself from her ardent embrace. "You always hated me. Why don't you leave me alone?"

"I don't hate you," said Gale, beginning to cry, and holding him all the tighter. "I never hated you. I love you, Ralph, and you know it! Why, I've loved you all my life!"

"You *what*?" cried Ralph, twisting so that one corner of his mouth was free for utterance.

"I love you!" said Gale fiercely.

There was a pause. Kirk Morgan stood staring, open-mouthed, a sickly white color showing under the deep tan of his skin.

"Then what are you always bothering me and bawling me out for?" Ralph asked, speaking perforce into her wet bathing suit, after a brief but ineffectual attempt to wrench loose from her embrace.

Gale wept the harder and held Ralph the tighter.

"I wouldn't have cared, if I hadn't loved you," she said. "It was only because I loved you. You made me so mad!"

Kirk Morgan took a step forward.

"Gale!" he said entreatingly. "Gale!"

Gale looked up.

"Go away," she said crossly. "Haven't you got any sense?"

Kirk bowed, turned, and went away from there, walking rather grandly. Gale giggled a little. Ralph was writhing in her embrace.

"Say, let me loose, will you?" he said querulously. "Darn it, let me loose! I want to hug you!"

For this purpose she released him. The hugging having been accomplished, they walked up the dock together hand in hand, oblivious of Denny Shevlin, who was still sitting on the float.

He watched them for a little time as they walked together, looking at each other, their faces foolish with happiness. Then

he turned again to the business of dabbling his fat pink toes in the cool green water.

He sighed heavily.

"I told him!" he said to himself. "I warned the boy! I told him he'd get himself into a pot of trouble if he monkeyed around with that matchmaking business! I told him!"

### I HAVE KNOWN THE RUSH OF WINDS

I HAVE known the rush of winds,  
The roll of a driven boat,  
And stood on wet and glistening decks,  
With the salt spray on my throat;  
I have heard the waves crash,  
And all that roars and cries—  
The gray seas in tumult,  
And the gray, sullen skies.

I have known the east wind  
And cursed the *wanderlust*—  
The east wind that tears the sea  
And brings the heart distrust;  
And I have watched the spindrift  
In pillars rise and fall  
And break across the forward deck—  
And I have loved it all!

The spindrift, like a curtain  
Of white beads in the air,  
That sways above a wave's crest,  
Ephemeral and fair,  
And, shattered in its flying,  
Has spilled its beads again,  
Like broken lace upon the seas  
Where ships sail with men.

Until you know the salt spray  
When softer than a kiss,  
And know its sting upon your face  
When waves break and hiss,  
You cannot know the sea's moods  
And all of hate and love,  
Or cherish most a level sea  
And the still stars above;

To feel the spell of smooth nights  
Of moon and mystery,  
The whisper underneath the prow  
That cuts the marbled sea;  
And, lying on the forward deck,  
When all but murmurs cease—  
I have known the rush of winds,  
But now I love the peace!

Charles Divine

# The Promised Land

COLONEL BOLIVAR REDMOND STRUGGLES WITH THE PROBLEM  
OF KEEPING HIS COLORED PEOPLE AT HOME  
IN THE SOUTH

By Garrard Harris

COLONEL BOLIVAR REDMOND sat on the wide front porch, his feet propped against one of the big columns, his chair tilted back, his hat brim pulled down over his eyes. His right hand mechanically toyed with the white imperial on his chin; his left rested idly on the arm of the rocking-chair, and held a burned-out cigar.

From the gentle knoll upon which Ellerslie, plantation home of the Redmonds, was embowered in a grove of great oaks, the estate reached in every direction—a baronial domain of rich acres.

To the left was the plantation cotton gin, the blacksmith shop, and the commissary store, where the two county roads crossed. In the store was the post office of Ellerslie. Along the roads were many tenant houses, in various stages of disrepair, and most of them vacant. Two-thirds of the cultivable land of Ellerslie was lying idle, covered with a dense crop of cockle burrs and ragweeds.

In the wide hall behind the colonel some one was sweeping, and a musical voice kept singing over and over again:

"I am bound for the Promise' La-a-a-and,  
I am bound for the Promise' Land!  
Oh, who will come and go with me-e-e-e?  
I am bound for the Promise' Land!"

"Nancy, come here!"

Colonel Redmond half turned in his chair. A neat yellow girl, broom in hand, approached and stood inquiringly.

"Want to make a quarter—real easy?"

"Yes, sir, colonel."

"Here it is. I'm paying you not to sing that infernal song again. All you colored folks are singing it, and it's got on my

nerves. Have you-all adopted it as the African national anthem?"

"No, sir," she replied, smiling. "I reckon one hears another sing it, and that puts 'em in mind. It's an old camp meeting tune."

She went back to her work.

Mrs. Redmond, a slight, fragile woman with gray hair and traces of former striking beauty, joined her husband. A glance revealed to her sympathetic eyes that he was nervous and worried.

"I heard your trade with Nancy," she began smilingly. "I think that is rather a sweet old air."

"But every ducky on the place is singing it. To them, the Promised Land means up North. That's what they're thinking about when they sing it."

"They certainly are leaving for up there!" said Mrs. Redmond, and sighed.

"Thirty thousand have gone from Georgia, twenty thousand or more from Alabama, about fifteen thousand from Mississippi, and ten thousand from Louisiana—so I saw in the paper yesterday," the colonel said. "And still going. That family I had down in the bend is gone—vanished. I thought they were well satisfied, and I didn't watch them closely. They had fair crop prospects, too."

"Owe you anything, Bolivar?"

"About two hundred and forty dollars."

"Well, it might be worse," she said, and smiled, to comfort him.

"I don't know. That's the twenty-third family to decamp from Ellerslie. The total of what they owe, and what I'll never see a cent of, is five thousand six hundred dollars—about."

Mrs. Redmond was aghast.

"Why, Bolivar! I had no idea it was so much!"

"The worst of it is, they leave me short of day labor hands, to make my crop with, aside from their share crops. And this boll weevil is awful! Three years ago we made twenty-two hundred bales; last fall we got one hundred and ten. It has pushed me to raise tax money."

The two sat, lost in thought. There was a strange silence upon Ellerslie. There was no sound of singing from the fields; no cheerful clink-clank of sharpening plow points or mending hoes from the smithy. The blacksmith had fled, too. Faintly, from the dismal cypress trees bordering the bayou in the distance, came the mournful sobbing of a dove.

"By Heaven, I feel just like that dove sounds!" blurted the old planter. "If this keeps up, I don't know where we'll end. The poorhouse, I reckon!"

"Miss Loulie, can I get off after dinner?" asked a pleasant voice.

Nancy was in the front hall, eagerly awaiting an answer.

"Why, I wanted you to mop this gallery and wash the front windows; but if there's any good reason—"

"Yes'm, my grandma, what's over on the Watkins place is sick. I want to go see her."

"Oh, very well, then!" agreed the kindly mistress. "Is there anything I can do—any little delicacy I can send that would tempt her appetite?"

"No'm, I don't know if she can eat a-tall. She's mighty low."

"Well, if I can help in any way, let me know."

"Yes'm. Thanky, ma'am."

Nancy disappeared.

"That girl's lying. I can tell it every time when a darky is lying to me," growled the colonel.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, Bolivar!"

"All right! All right! Have your way; but she's up to something, sure's a gun's iron!"

"Why don't you ride over and see Mr. Richardson and Bob Watkins and Major Pendleton? Perhaps you-all could figure out some way to make it more attractive, so the negroes won't leave."

"Good suggestion, Loulie! I'll go right after dinner, if you'll hurry it up. But as long as those that have gone North write back here that they're picking ten-dollar

bills off the bushes, and about it being a regular Utopia for them, this unrest is going to keep up."

## II

Down at the commissary, Mr. William Twickenham, manager, clerk, postmaster, and bookkeeper, found time hanging heavy on his hands since so many of the negroes—his chief patrons—had gone. He paced idly up and down the store, where his foot-falls echoed among the half empty shelves. Stock had been allowed to run down, being replenished only in dribblets of the barest necessities.

Mr. Twickenham was an old bachelor and a former sport, who had run through a handsome patrimony to the benefit of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange brokers, in bucking the cotton futures market. He had also been a benefactor of a certain poker game on Royal Street, of the roulette game, of the races, and of sundry complainant ladies descended, apparently, from the daughters of the horse leech who continually cried:

"Give! Give!"

He had been educated for the bar, but his practice had been confined to the sort with a brass foot rail—to which he took enthusiastically. Being a first cousin of Mrs. Bolivar Redmond, who was a Twickenham, family honor demanded that he should be given asylum and haven when the end of his brilliant career had come. He got forty dollars a month and a room and meals with the family, and had been there fifteen years. Mrs. Redmond called him "Cousin Willy," and so did the colonel.

He paused in his march at the end of the right-hand counter near the front door to exchange pleasantries with Bun, his pet squirrel, for whom, a few days before, he had purchased an elegant tin cage made like a Swiss chalet, with a large revolving wheel, on which Bun exercised frantically.

Tiring of Bun and his marathon against time, Cousin Willy cautiously glanced out through the front door. Nobody being in sight, he stepped behind the left-hand counter, picked up a ten-cent bottle of lemon flavoring extract, and went back to the partitioned office in the rear. Emptying the contents of the bottle into a tumbler, he added water and gulped it, with a wry face.

He had never been wholly able to reconcile himself to lemon extract. Still, in these



times of scarcity, it was not nearly as dangerous as bootleg liquor—nor as expensive. It was grain alcohol, with oil of lemon and a bit of water added, and it really gave one quite a little glow after one forgot the taste. But he drew the line on vanilla.

Mr. Twickenham then wiped his mouth and carefully dropped the bottle through a knot hole in the floor behind the desk. There were hundreds of bottles down under there. Colonel Redmond swore roundly at the jobbers' last bill for lemon extract, but Cousin Willy had assured him that it was a staple, and that the negroes were passionately devoted to it, so plenty must be kept on hand.

Fortified, somewhat perked up, his faded blue eyes a bit brighter, he gave his gray mustache the old-time jaunty twist and emerged from the office. He was fervently hoping Cousin Loulie wouldn't have lemon pie for dinner. She had a fondness for that dessert, and he felt that to face lemon pie on top of lemon extract would be just about the last straw.

He raised his head and noticed Jim Jackson standing in awed amazement, watching Bun make the cylinder revolve.

"What make him go so fast, when he ain't goin' nowhar an' got nuffin' to do when he gits dere, Mist' Willy?" inquired Jim, a puzzled grin on his very, very black face.

"But he don't know he isn't getting anywhere. Maybe he thinks he is."

"Like a lot of folks—like me, f'r instance. I keeps goin' through the motions of makin' a livin', but I ain't making a bit more headway den dat squirl."

Jim had never taken his eyes off the cage.

"World full of folks like that, Jim; but when they're dead, it don't make much difference what they had or didn't have. Did you want anything, Jim?"

"Yes, sir—want to draw a few rations. Done stretched that last draw twell dey done gone."

"What do you want?"

"Side meat, meal, flour, 'lasses, coffee, sugar, lard, grits, oatmeal—"

"Hold on! Hold on! Colonel told me to issue nothing but absolute necessities. Things look mighty bilious. Not a quarter of a force on the place—boll weevil eating up what crop there is, and him a big loser on the niggers that have run off."

"I knows times is tight on de cunnel.

It's hard on de niggers, too. I's in debt, an' not a chance in dis world to get even, let alone come out ahead. My cotton's plumb lousy wid them boll weevil bugs—looks like dey breeds overnight dis showery weather."

"Sorry, Jim, but it isn't my commissary. I'll have to hold you down to side meat, meal, and molasses."

"No coffee, sugar, grits, flour, oatmeal, ner nothin'?"

"It's the best I can do, Jim."

"Mist' Willy, I has fo' little chillens. I don't mind for myse'f, an' Lucy don't mind; but if you puts chillens on short rations, it ain't good for 'em. Besides, dem po' lil young uns don't get much enjoyment in dis worl', an' eatin' is one of de fonder things dey is of. Dey earns it, too. Dem chillens is right now out in dese showers pickin' dem weevil bugs off'n de cotton. Dey helps chop grass, pull weeds, an' hoe cotton—an' dey's entitled to draw better rations."

Sweat was running down Jim's black face as he pleaded for the children. Twickenham went back behind the counter.

"Jim, you're a good darky; and even if I am an old bachelor, I love children, black and white. They can't suffer, or have their little hearts or stomachs disappointed, as long as I've a shirt to my back. I'm going to issue all the rations you need, and I'll charge it to my own account if the colonel rows about it. If you can ever pay me back, all right. If you don't, all right. It will be enough to know I stood by the children!"

"Thanky, Mist' Willy, thanky, suh! I'll never fergit you. You always is been my fr'en'!"

Jim hung around and watched the frantic Bun's endeavors to see how fast he could revolve the cylinder, while the order was being made up. Finally, his supplies in a crocus sack on his shoulder, from Twickenham's advice he left by the door on the far side of the building, so that the colonel, glooming up on the porch, might not be prompted by the size of the load to come down and start an embarrassing inquiry.

Cousin Willy went back and refreshed himself with another bottle of lemon extract. It always made him momentarily feel his come-down—he for whom golden champagne had bubbled, for whom absinth anisettes had been prepared by deft hands, who had been among the stanchest

patrons of Ramos's delectable and wonderful gin fizzes and the equally divine Sazerac cocktails in the heyday of New Orleans's reign as the capital of the Kingdom of Joy—the city that care forgot. Descended to lemon extract—with Jamaica ginger, when the stock became temporarily exhausted!

Though these memories were poignant, they invested Cousin Willy with a certain dignity and self-appreciation. He had been a real sport while the money lasted. He had had his moments, and they would come again when he could get somebody to back his judgment on cotton futures with cash. He was making fabulous fortunes regularly, following the quotations in the New Orleans *Picayune*, buying mentally, and keeping most painstaking memoranda of his Barmecide winnings.

### III

JIM JACKSON trudged homeward with his supplies. Halfway there, when he turned into the long lane leading to his cabin, he noticed Old Beck, an ancient gray mule that had been on the place for all of twenty years. Old Beck was down, to rise no more.

Jim had plowed Beck many seasons, and felt an affection for the poor old worn-out creature. He put down his sack and eased the mule's head into a more comfortable position. Then he stood, watching the animal's feeble struggles to hold on to its fleeting life.

"Well, good-by, Ole Beck!" Jim said, as if in farewell to a friend. "You's been a good ole mule, fai'ful an' steady. You's never knowed nothin' but hard work. Now, here you is, done come to de een' of your row. What has you got out of dis life? Nuffin'—an' you'll soon be daid an' gone. Jes' hard work—dat's all. Good-by, Ole Beck! If dere's a mule heaven, you sho' oughter go dere!"

He shouldered his sack and went on a little distance, his shining black face troubled. Presently he stopped, put his sack on the ground, and leaned against the rail fence. He began talking to himself, as negroes not infrequently do.

"Jim Jackson, you is like two critters. One of 'em is dat dam' fool squir'l what keeps wuckin' hisse'f in going round and round, gittin' nowhere at all. You is also like dat poor ole worn-out mule back yonder, what's done come to de een'. Nuffin' but work, an' you ain't got nowhar 't all.

You been at it since you could lift a hoe, when you was six years old. You is near to fawty, an' has to beg grub for your chillen—an' sort of charity grub what you got, at that!"

He paused, took off his battered felt hat, and scratched his head thoughtfully.

"What right is you to bring dem two lil boys an' two lil gals up to be jest beasties of burden, like you an' Ole Beck?" he continued. "You can't read ner write; there ain't much chance your chillens will, neither. It ain't fair to dem, an' yit what you gwine do, wid not one red cent of cash money, and de cotton crop done gone plumb to hell 'count of dem pesky weevil bugs?"

Jim shouldered his sack again and trudged down a lane to where his one-room-and-lean-to kitchen home was located. The four children danced about him gleefully, leading him to the back door to show him a full quart of boll weevils which they had picked from the cotton plants and scalded to death.

"Dat's fine of you kids! But I reckon dere'll be as many more in de mornin'," he sighed.

"I reckon dere's twice dat many we couldn' ketch," asserted Pearline, the eldest of the children.

"Well, Lucy, honey, I managed to make a draw; but dey sho' is shuttin' down on de tenants. Times is suttingly tight, an' dey's likely to git wuss."

Lucy received the news in surly silence. She was a mulatto, and had a resentful, complaining streak in her, derived from some poor white trash overseer ancestor. There were ambitions within her that never bothered Jim. He was pure African, with a sunny optimism that was never submerged for long. Lucy was loud-mouthed, high-tempered, and dissatisfied, and she ruled Jim, who had found long ago that the easiest path to peace was to let her have her way.

Back at the big house, Colonel Redmond was telling his wife of the conference of four plantation owners.

"It was a fine suggestion of yours, Loulie. I think we see daylight ahead now. We'll coöperate and build a nice new schoolhouse where the four places corner. That will put it within a mile and a half of all the tenants on each place. We agreed to pay the salary of a good teacher, who will preach, too. We'll build a new

church and repair the cabins. We determined to employ more wages hands, and to pay cash—that is, to use them in our work half of the time, giving them the other half for their own crops. We've also determined to put in two hundred acres apiece of alfalfa next spring; to pitch a late crop of corn this year, and some cowpeas, and to cut and bale hay coöperatively. We've got to have more labor, so we will employ an agent to recruit us some more families. We won't bother with cotton for a year or so. I've got to go up to Memphis and borrow some money on the land, to carry my end of the program."

"That is fine!" agreed his wife. "Now, if you will insist upon each tenant putting in an ample garden, keeping some chickens, a pig or two, and a cow each, if possible, the burden of financing food for them until crop time will be largely taken off you—and the risk, too."

"The amendment is accepted in full, Loulie. We ought to have been doing that all the time. We are on the right track now. And—oh, yes—remember what I said about Nancy? Watkins said there wasn't a soul sick on his place, and there wasn't a woman there old enough to be Nancy's grandmother!"

#### IV

BACK at the Jackson cabin, fireflies were flickering about in the grass, and crickets were singing their evensong. Nancy, the colonel's house girl, wearily dragged herself up to the door, sat upon the step, and asked for a drink of water.

"Where at you been, gal? You looks plumb beat out," said Jim.

"Over to Climax post office."

"Climax? That's six miles there an' six back. What you doing over dere?"

"Went after my mail."

"Why don't you get your mail at Ellerslie, right at you?"

"Don' want too many folks to know my business."

"You's talkin' foolishment. Nobody payin' any 'tention to you!"

"I don' want Mister Willy and the cunnel to know."

"Fer why?"

"That's why!"

Nancy pulled from an envelope a crisp, brand-new ten-dollar bill, which had never been folded but once. She flung it toward Jim triumphantly.

"That's the second one I got. When I get the fourth one, two weeks from now, you won't see me here any more. I'm goin' Nawth!"

"Where'd you git it?" asked Lucy breathlessly.

"Remember George, what the draft took to fight them bush Germans in France?"

"Sho'ly—Aunt Liza's boy. I thought he got kilt."

"No, wounded. The government sent him to school, learned him to read and write, and paid him while he was doin' it. Then he sent his books to me, and I learned. He's at work up there, making five dollars a day."

"Says which?" blurted Jim Jackson. "Don't brag like dat, Nancy. De debbil will get you for lyin'. You means five dollars a week."

"You-all keep your mouths shut, and I'll read you what he says," returned Nancy.

Two awed nods of assent gave answer. This was the letter:

MISS NANCY WILKINS, RESPT. MADAM:

I takes my pen in hand to say I is well and hopes you is same. I sends another tenspot. I will send another next week, and one week after, with direcshtuns how to get here, when we will be marryed, but don't let nobody know. The white folks might try to stop you.

You can get a fine Job as maid, not less than 40\$ a month, maybe fifty, sixty, seventy, if you get with these rich folks what has been used to what they calls Sweeds and Wopps what don't know nothin. When a Colored Person what has been traned by quality folks down home comes up here, these folks goes crazy about them. With you making not less than 40\$ and me 150\$, and maybe more later, we will get along fine, but it costs a lot to live here.

These steel mills needs more hands, and will pay their railroad fair, and is using many Colored People, which is good workers and aint no Balshyviks like these here Bohunks and Wopps, which is getting scarce, for the Gov't won't let no more of 'em in. The boss said he wished they was all at the devil and he had Col'd People.

They is lots of our folks up here, and good schools the same that the white children go to, nice houses, and the reason I dont send the money all to one time is I am byeing some Furnichure on the Extortion plan, and I have leesed a nice 2 room appartment for you and me, and the payments is sure stout. It is steam heted and nice and clean, but the nabors is nothin but Wopps and Hunkeys, wich is not fit for quality-raised folks like us to Sociate with.

These folks up here aint interested in you except your money. If you got money you is in High; if you aint you is out of Luck. Tell any of the men folks they can get jobs at once, three and a half to four dollars a day for common labor. There is one Col'd man here on the channell rolls



in the steel mill makes 15\$ a day, which I expect to be one too some time.

Write soon and with mutch love I am Resp'y  
Your Husban soon,

GEORGE.

"Jim, it's de Promise' Land!" exclaimed Lucy, with great animation. "We got t' get there!"

"How we gwine git there? No money! go nowhar or do nothin' at all!"

"Look at dese here raggedy lil chillen! Look at us! Look at dis shack! No schools for de chillen, 'cept eight miles off, and dey can't go. No chance of a crop—weebils done et it up. Same thing next year—an' de next—and de next! Why?"

—Lucy's voice rose shrilly—"we're just like mules. Work twell we is wore out; die an' be forgot like beasties. Rouse up, Jim—be a man! Figger some way to git us up where we'll have a chance!"

Jim shuddered, as his wife's words conjured up again the feeble, futile struggles of Old Beck at the end of his row, dying in a roadside ditch. A cold sweat beaded his brow.

"Lucy, don't go git yourse'f all excited, now. What we wants to do an' what we kin do is something else agin. I ain't got a cent, an', so far, I don't see no chance of one."

"Git dem steel mills to send you de money."

"But what about de account I owes de cunnel—over a hunderd and seventy-five dollars? De steel mills won't pay it, an' I can't pay it. De law of dis State is you can't move off de landlord's place widout first payin' him supply accounts an' rent."

"Lots of 'em is done gone," meaningly replied Lucy.

"Yeah, I know—slipped off like thieves an' lef' de cunnel wid de bag to hold. He's hard up, too. He's been decent to us. He's paid his money out for dat grub we's et up. He's stood by us when we was sick, and he ain't never give me a unkind word, an' I don't want do him no dirt."

"He's made a lot off'n you, in time," sneered Lucy.

"They sure are good folks," interrupted Nancy, who was trying to avert a row. "Miss Loulie always is kind, and so is cunnel. He gets fractious sometimes, but he don't mean a thing. Still, a person is got to live they own life. I'm gittin' two dollars a week here. Get ten, at least, maybe lots more, up yonder. I got to go."

"But look at dese yere raggedy chillen, Nancy! Look at us!" shrilled Lucy. "We owes de chillen a chance. Why couldn't you go away an' make de money you owes cunnel an' send it to him, Jim?"

That was a new idea to Jim, who was no financier. It seemed a fair enough idea, and at such fabulous wages he could soon clear the debt up.

"Well," he admitted dubiously, "if I jes' had money to make a start on toward de Promise' Lan'—"

"Look here, you folks is harder up than I is," said Nancy, feeling the first effects of affluence. "I got eleven dollars saved up out of my wages. You-all take this here ten dollars—it will get you on the way. You can pay me back when you lands one of them fine jobs."

The girl handed the crisp bill to Lucy. The mulatto woman had never had ten dollars of her own all at one time. It awed her, and Jim had a sudden breathless feeling that they had burned the bridges behind them.

"Whar would it be best to go, Nancy?" queried Jim.

"That ten won't take you far, but you can stop off and work, and maybe meet up with a labor agent that will send you up and pay your fare. I'd strike for Memphis or Birmingham, first."

Nancy rose stiffly, and went on toward the big house. Jim and Lucy sat silent, overwhelmed with the sudden and unexpected turn of fortune.

## V

JIM got up and began to wander about aimlessly, trying to nerve himself for the plunge. The railroad was four miles distant, the nearest station being Magnolia, which boasted a little plantation commissary, a gin, a blacksmith shop, a country general store—run by Squire Leggett, justice of the peace—and some cotton seed houses along a switch track. Jim did not know in which direction Memphis or Birmingham lay, nor the train schedule. He knew that the fast trains roared through Magnolia contemptuously, and that all that stopped there was a little three-coach local, one way each day.

He started to the commissary, thinking that perhaps he could artlessly pump some information out of Mr. Willy. In the dusk he passed Old Beck, stark and still. The mule's troubles were over.



Down by the mysterious dark waters of the bayou a whippoorwill was iterating its eerie song. There were sonorous basses from bullfrogs along sedgy banks. A screech owl lit on the chimney of a deserted cabin and mewed shiveringly.

Cold chills careered up and down Jim's backbone. It was a sure sign of death to the house where an owl sounded its cry three times. Perhaps this meant that some of Josh Jamison's folks had died among the perils to which they had decamped up North months before.

Jim was glad to emerge into the light streaming through the door of the commissary. There was Mr. Willy, standing by, admiring the unbelievable exertions of Bun spinning his wheel. Jim was rather struck with a similarity in the appearance of the manager and his pet. Mr. Willy had a retreating chin much like Bun's, a sloping forehead, and a sort of perky way about him; only he was not at all energetic.

"Come in, Jim! Devilish glad to see you. It's lonesome here since all the niggers have gone. Come in!"

There was a tinge of boisterous hilarity in Mr. Willy's greeting. His face was rather red, and he rocked slightly upon heel and toe in maintaining equilibrium.

"Sho' is glad to see you, Mist' Willy. I want some 'dvice."

"I never give advice unless I am duly fortified—retained, I might say in legal parlance, James, even if I provide the retainer. Come back here, J-J-J-him!"

He wrestled valiantly with a hiccup, almost bested it, and then it detonated like the back-fire of a flivver.

In the back office, he produced a dusty glass and handed it to Jim. Into it he emptied a bottle of vanilla extract. Into his own he emptied lemon.

"A gen-gennelman never drinks alone, if he can help it," gravely observed Mr. Willy. "It is permissible to do so with a valued and faithful family retainer, and on proper basis as such. I give you vanilla, Jim, because you have not strong prejudices, nor memories of a downfall to embitter your cup. I have. Moreover, the stock of lemon must be con-con-conserved!" He exploded again on the last word. "Down with it!"

"Sho' is a noble dram!" Jim smacked appreciatively. "Lawdy, if I had money I'd buy me a dozen cans of dese yer oily minners—sardeens, you calls 'em—an' a

dozen bottles of dat dere vanilly, an' I sho' would have a time!"

The incriminating evidence was duly disposed of through the knot hole.

"Now, James, what is biting you?" inquired the host, deftly rolling a cigarette with brown paper and perique tobacco.

The alcoholic content of the vanilla was giving Jim courage and volubility.

"Mist' Willy, I went home, and de chillen had a full quart of dem weebil bugs dey picked. I look at dat cotton field. The bugs is got it. I got no more chance of makin' what I owe de cunnel dan a rabbit has of passin' th'oo hell an' not scorchin' his fur!"

"James, there are many families on El-lerslie in your fix. I don't know what we are going to do. Jobbers are hollering for money owing for stock, and there is none—and only one gross of lemon extract left!"

"I hears niggers is makin' big money in de towns. S'pose I leave my folks here, go to town, get a good job, an' begin payin' de cunnel off, so much a week?"

In his lemonized state of optimism, Mr. Twickenham said he thought it was a very fine idea. From him the information was obtained that the local train to Memphis went North at 6.35 A.M., and that the fare was two dollars; but he cautioned Jim not to mention that he had furnished this bit of advice.

Back home, in high excitement, Jim commanded Lucy to cook up some of the rations as lunch for him until he got to Memphis. He began sorting his clothes to make up a bundle, and Lucy fell to making corn bread and frying meat.

"Well, I better be leavin' soon, so's I'll be dere when de train comes," suggested Jim.

"Wait a minute! I'll be ready."

"What you mean?"

"You reckon I gwine stay here widout you? We'd starve!"

"Oh, no, you wouldn't! It would look bad, de whole crowd leavin'."

"Don't keer how it looks!"

"But, Lucy, I means to be hones', an' pay de cunnel."

"We ain' gwine hender you. I'll take in washin' an' help."

"It looks like we skippin' out."

"Don't keer, I tole you once!"

"Dem chillen can't walk de fo' miles at night," Jim weakly argued, changing his tactics.

"You carry lil Josie, an' I'll carry Woodrow. Pearlina an' George Washin'ton kin walk."

"Cunnel will sho' think we tryin' to beat him!"

"Oh, shut up. I got de money. If I don't go, you can't go."

Jim gave it up. Lucy was always contentious and determined, and it had become a habit with him to defer for the sake of peace.

"Well, if we got to pack de chillen, de sooner we starts de better!"

## VI

THERE was nothing to leave—no stock, no chickens, no pigs, not even a dog. The front door was closed from the outside about one o'clock, and, with the sleepy, frightened children, mother and father started down the lane on the great adventure. As they passed Old Beck, stiff and stark now, and visible in the wan light of the moon in its last quarter, Jim's heart leaped exultantly.

"We ain't gwine work ourse'fs to death an' die in de ditch like worn-out mules! We gwine have a chance, an' we gwine give these chillen a chance!" he whispered to Lucy.

"In de Promise' Lan'—praise de Lawd!" she answered fervently.

The terrified elder children clung to the hands of their parents, and stumbled along sleepily. The road lay through dank swamps, through black forests. Great owls hooted derisively at the pilgrims, and cackled in eldritch laughter. There were vague, stealthy noises out in the canebrakes. From a patch of darkness a pair of luminous green eyes glared. Jim hurled a stone, and something crashed through the vegetation, fleeing.

At length, before dawn, they arrived at Magnolia Station. As it became light enough to see, a dozen or more negroes could be noted, furtively slipping about the outskirts of the little settlement, dodging behind the cotton seed storage sheds by the switch track, and generally acting as if to be observed was the very least of their present ambitions. The Jim Jacksons, however, blundered right along to the little boxlike station building of two rooms.

A fat, unctuous, and very black man, with a long coat known as a "jimswinger," and much affected by the clerical colored brothers, approached. Jim had noticed

him conferring with sundry of the dodging crowd.

"Where is you bound to, brother?" the fat man inquired in saccharine accents.

"Memphis—up Nawth," Jim answered vaguely.

"Well, now, if you is lookin' for employment at good wages, I has been empowered to offer jobs to folks workin' in de mines, de iron furnaces, de steel mills, an' so on, over to Bummin'ham—three dollars a day."

"Ain't got money 'nuff to go to Bummin'ham," said Jim.

"But we 'vances de railroad fare, brother. I would be proud to have you jine us. All dese bretheren an' sisteren is goin' along wid me."

Jim conferred with Lucy.

"Is dere any chance to take in washin's an' sich?" she demanded.

"Dear sister, dere is nothin' else but. De preparation of clean gyarments is a great industry—pays well, too. So much smoke an' soot in Bummin'ham, white folks has to wear lots of clo'es, an' de washin's is big."

"We'll go wid you," announced Lucy.

"I is Elder Hunt. I is a general 'vance agent of better times for colored folks."

"Well, elder, you gwine pay de fare?" asked Jim.

"Sho'ly, brother—sho'ly!"

The ticket agent—a clerk over in the general store—finally came to open the window. The elder was right there, hauling an impressive wad of bills from his pocket. All his new wards crowded into the waiting room, and had their eyes glued on that roll of money.

"Hold on there! Are you a labor agent?"

The question came from a white man at the door of the colored waiting room. He wore a wide-brimmed felt hat, boots, and a belt on which there hung a scabbard, inhabited by an impressive old-style blue steel revolver.

"Who—me?" innocently replied Elder Hunt, turning and smiling blandly.

"No—you! Where you takin' these folks?"

"Lawsy, boss, I ain't takin' 'em nowhar. Dey jes' ain't used to travelin', and axed me to buy deir tickets."

"Where you-all goin'?" demanded the man of the crowd.

There was a profound silence.

"Answer me, damn it! Where—why,

derned if this isn't Jim from over at Ellerslie! Where you bound, Jim?"

"Bummin'ham, boss."

"Got a receipt from the colonel? You and him fixed up your accounts all right?"

"Well, in a way, suh. Bugs done et up de cotton, an' I'm goin' off to get a job an' pay him."

"Le's see your receipt, or permit, then."

"I didn't know I had to have a paper."

"Sure have! Got to have a clearance or permit from the landlord, under the law in this State. Jim, I sorter think you were fixing to skin out. I'll have to hold you until I get in touch with the colonel. I'm the constable of this beat. Where'd you first see this fat boy?"

He indicated Elder Hunt, who was now perspiring profusely and wore an anxious expression.

"He axed me if I wanted a job in Bummin'ham, an' he would advance de money to git dere on," replied Jim, innocently spilling the beans.

"A-ha! Reverend, consider yourself under arrest on the charge of enticing labor. If you haven't a license, that will be another charge."

The constable took out his gun and held it carelessly, ready for emergencies, as he maintained his strategic position outside the one door.

"Hey, Walter, step over and ask the squire to come over here an' bring some blank affidavits. I got about half the niggers in this beat penned up in here, and I can't leave."

The ticket agent obligingly did so, and Squire Leggett ambled over with a fountain pen and the blanks, which he proceeded to fill out. Jim's headed the list.

In the midst of it an automobile drove up, and Jim's teeth began chattering as he saw Colonel Bolivar Redmond descend. The colonel was on his way to Memphis to raise a few thousand dollars by mortgage, to carry out the new program. Jim thought the colonel was after him.

"I've got one of your families in here, colonel. He says you-all are financial and O. K. How about it?" asked the constable.

The colonel was angry.

"Why, Jim, you black scoundrel! I thought you'd be about the last man on my place to play me a low-down trick like this!"

"Cunnel, I didn't see no chance of payin' you from de crop. I swear I didn't

mean to beat you out of one red cent. I just wanted to get to work and make some money."

"Jim, this hurts me—actually hurts me. I thought you were a higher class man than to sneak off this way. It isn't so much the amount you owe me. I'm just downright disappointed and grieved."

"Cunnel, if I'd 'a' come to you, you wouldn't have seen it like I seen it. No other chance in de world!"

"It has been a bad year, Jim, and last year was bad, and we all suffered; but next year we may all make a clean-up. I think things are going to be better for you folks now. We can all pull together and come out on top. Now you go back home, and—"

"Sorry, colonel, but I've arrested this whole outfit, and they've got to face the charge. I've some costs coming, too."

Constable Scott had made a killing.

"Well, Jim, they've got you dead to rights. Nothing to do but plead guilty—but I'll stand by you, like I always do for my colored folks. I'll sign your bond. You'll take the plea now and just enter it up later on the docket, won't you, judge?"

Squire Leggett was dubious.

"Kind of irregular, colonel."

"I've got to catch this train, and it's due in three minutes—"

"Oh, all right, then! Jim, do you plead guilty to the charge of attempting to run off without having settled landlord and supply bills?"

"Yes, suh, jedge, I reckon dat's hit," Jim answered shamefacedly.

"I'll fine you one hundred dollars, with one hundred days in jail, and the costs."

"Oh, my Lawd! Oh, my Lawd!" screeched Lucy.

The children began to add their frightened wailings.

"Shet up dat racket! Didn't you hear my white folks say he gwine sign my bon' an' see me th'oo?" demanded Jim. "He ain't gwine let 'em take me nowhar ner do nothin' to me!"

"Now, judge, will you kindly suspend that fine and jail sentence, during good behavior, but to be enforced any time I as bondsman surrender Jim?"

"All right, colonel. Jim, you understand that?"

"Yes, suh."

"The costs are seven dollars and seventy-five cents," suggested Constable Scott.

"I'll hand them to you when I get back from Memphis to-morrow afternoon. Now, Jim, you and Lucy and the children are tired, I reckon. Joe, come here!" The colonel beckoned his chauffeur. "You take Jim and his outfit home in the car. Jim, here's a dollar. You better go over to the store and buy a little snack for your folks, and a dime's worth of candy for the children. We'll all pull out all right, and I'm not mad with you, so just forget all this and take a fresh start."

"Sho' will, cunnel!" promised Jim, greatly relieved.

Lucy sat silent and unresponsive.

The train pulled in, and the colonel climbed aboard.

"All right, Jim—you and your folks can come out. Go on and do your trading, but stick around. I summon you as a witness in the case of this fat boy here," advised Scott.

The trial of Elder Hunt was reached later. On the testimony of Jim and some others who weakened, he was fined two hundred dollars, and sentenced to one hundred days for enticing labor, with a similar dose on the second charge of not having a license as a labor agent.

The other negroes, who were mainly from the Watkins and Richardson places, also pleaded guilty. They were held until the owners of those estates could come and pay the costs and arrange for their release. The unfortunate elder was locked up in the calaboose, with the others, until he could be taken to the county seat and put to work on the roads.

About midday all the court formalities were over. Jim and his wife invested the colonel's dollar and a part of their ten dollars in things they craved. Then they sailed grandly back to Ellerslie in the owner's car, and entered the house they had never expected to see again.

"Well, we's stopped this time, but we ain't stopped for good!" declared Lucy acrimoniously. "We gwine make it yet, but never no more to Magnolia. We gwine git away!"

"Shucks, I b'lieve I'll fight it out," replied Jim. "Some of dem niggers told me dey heard you had to work powerful hard. We ain't gwine starve here, an' cunnel said things would be better."

"We's gwine away!" Lucy was adamant. "Ain't no chance here, even in good crop years. Chillen got no chance. You

better git out of that notion of stayin'. You got to go—you hear me?"

## VII

FAR into the night Lucy dinned it into Jim's ears, and she began again at daylight next morning. In the afternoon, Jim just had to get away from her nagging and resentful mouthing. He caught some crickets, dug some worms, and lit out for a choice place down in the canebrake, where a great black gum log had lain in the bayou for many years, and was a choice haunt for bream. He fished until dark, catching nineteen big ones; and he made another discovery, which fired his imagination.

Stopping by the commissary to exhibit his string of fish to Mr. Willy, as an excuse, he deftly began extracting the information he sought.

"Mist' Willy, where at does dis yere bayou go?"

"Why—er—it empties into Mound Bayou about sixty miles south of here."

"An' where at does dat dere Mound Bayou go?"

"Gosh, is this a geography lesson? It empties into the Yazoo River."

"An' whar at does dat river go?"

"Empties into the Mississippi just above Vicksburg."

"Is Vicksburg a big place?"

"About twenty-five thousand—why?"

"Jes' wanted to know."

"Any other information—or anything you need?"

"Yas, suh—please gimme de key to de shop. Got to fix two hoe handles in de mawnin'."

Next morning Jim was at work in the smithy, using drawing knife and files on two white oak clapboards. These he fashioned into very good paddles, which he secreted in the tall jimson weeds behind the shop. When he went to return the key, he carried two hoes with him.

The next afternoon he ostentatiously walked, with fishing poles on his shoulder, past the commissary, where the colonel stood; but he did not do much fishing when he got to the bayou. He began digging mud out of a sunken bateau made of cypress boards, flat-bottomed and wide. It had belonged to Abe Washington, who had decamped six months before.

Jim washed it out and inspected it carefully. It was sound, and floated, but it was waterlogged. Leaving it to dry out some-



what, Jim caught a string of fish and went on home.

Three nights later, carrying the frying pan, skillet, all the salt meat and salt and meal in the house, a small bucket of lard bought over at Magnolia, some coffee and the pot, a supply of fish hooks, and a plentiful lot of crickets and earthworms, Jim, Lucy, and the four children slipped along in the shadows to where the bateau was moored.

Stowing the children amidships, Lucy took the stern seat and Jim the front. They silently dipped their paddles, and started down the black bosom of the bayou. The stars gave them their only light. There was the sonorous music of bullfrogs along the banks, the derisive hooting of great owls from the adjacent swamp, the splashing and flapping of big fish.

They paddled until daylight. Then they hid the boat under a clump of willows, made their camp in the midst of a cane-brake, and slept until nightfall.

They caught fish stealthily by day, watching, wary as muskrats, to see that no other human beings were around. Long dormant jungle instincts of their race rose in man and woman. They foraged by night into corn fields, and stole roasting ears. These they roasted in the shuck, or fried the corn in the pan. Some farmer's shote ventured too close, in his eagerness to garner scraps of food. Jim's arm shot out like lightning and grabbed a hind leg. His left closed over the unfortunate pig's snout before a squeal could be uttered. They barbecued that porker, and feasted upon it for three days.

They passed Yazoo City at night, and kept going until dawn.

"Shucks, Lucy! I'd ruther live this way than go to work in any old mills!" confided Jim, as he wallowed luxuriously in the shade of a dense thicket, after a royal gorge of fried catfish, corn bread, roasting ears, and coffee. "I think I'll jest stay run away an' live in de woods."

"You's gwine Nawth!" asserted Lucy, compressing her thin lips, her determination not one whit abated.

The next morning they passed a stable lot which came down to the bayou, and some chickens were out in the gray dawn, seeking the early worm. Jim placed a juicy cricket on a small bream hook, and flipped it temptingly near a fat pullet. She jumped for it, gulped, and was hauled into

the boat before a squawk could warn her associates. Two more were gathered in, and a mile below the place, in an unapproachable swamp, the chickens furnished an elysian menu for a fishless day.

After paddling all night again, the voyageurs could see, through the mists of wan, early light, towering hills with houses on them down to the water's edge. Beyond lay a vast, mysterious expanse of fog and water.

"I reckon dis must be Vicksburg," suggested Jim. "Sho' is more houses dan I ever seen befo'!"

At a landing, where many other boats were moored, they sold the bateau for three dollars to a water-front darky. From him they obtained directions where a colored eating stand might be found, and they trailed on up the hill.

"Right dis way, folks! Hot cat right off de fiah!" encouraged the proprietor of one of these emporiums, as he stood in his front door.

"Not fer me! I done et so much cat twill I plumb 'shamed to look a catfish in de face," replied Lucy. "We wants a place to sleep an' reg'lar viddles, like b'iled cabbage and pot liquor."

At the Colored Travelers' Rest the Jim Jackson tribe was soon gorged with the food they craved. In their room they slept right on through the long afternoon and until dawn of the next day.

Imbibing an early cup of coffee downstairs, while Lucy washed and tidied up the children, Jim cautiously approached the subject nearest his heart, as Mrs. Callie Bobo, proprietress of the Travelers' Rest, hung about solicitously.

"Does you know any folks what is pay-in' de fares of good workers?" he inquired in a low voice.

"Well, suh, if dat ain't de most fortunatest thing in de world! Brother Wash-in'ton Tibbs is stoppin' right here in dis very ho-tel. He's gwine Nawth to-night wid a whole cyarload of famblies on de 'Azoo Valley train."

She beamed most encouragingly, for Brother Tibbs had offered her a dollar for every recruit she could induce.

North! The word intrigued Jim greatly. The North was the goal of their ambitions. Their North was their Utopia, and he had stumbled right into means of getting there!

"Where at is Bre'r Tibbs?"

"Sleep. He don't git up so early."

"Ain't de ossifers liable to git him?"

"Law, no—he's too slick for 'em!" Callie declared. "Dey can' ketch him. He's shipped trainloads out o' Vicksburg, and they ain't ketched him till yit!"

"How do he head off de white folks? Dey is powerful slick deyse'fs."

"He jest perclains he runnin' a 'scursion for de benefit of his lodge, de Lost Tribe of Isrul, up to Greenville or Clarksdale. After de train starts, why, what de white folks don't know about whar dat crowd goes won't hurt 'em!"

"Sho' is slick! Sho' is noble! I wants to see him."

Brother Washington Tibbs came in at that very moment. He was large, impressive, unctuous, well fed, voluble, and with an air of mystery about him.

Jim explained himself, after being introduced by Sis' Callie.

"Uh-uh! Well, I wants it distinct understood dis ain't no labor agent business," said Brother Tibbs severely. "Dis is a 'scursion of de Lost Tribe of Isrul, of which I is de exalted sanhedrin. We's on a pleasure trip, an' you got to belong if you goes."

"I wants to jine."

"De 'nitiation fee is one dollar per each fer adults an' adultresses—chillen half price."

"But do I git a job up Nawth?" persisted Jim.

"You sho' is as butt-headed as a bull yearlin'! Dat's up to you. I takes you Nawth and bears all de 'spense, an' puts you in touch wid folks needin' help. You don't expect me to make de 'rangements an' do your work, too, does you?"

"Oh, no, suh—no, suh!" Brother Tibbs appeared testy, and Jim was afraid he might lose this Heaven-sent opportunity. "Well, we'll jine," he said eagerly.

Brother Tibbs was all sunshine again as he spread a legal-looking document on the table.

"Jes' sign here for you an' your fambly, brother."

"I can't read," confessed Jim.

"Dis here says you jines de party. You appoints me agent to make all arrangements for you on de train. You 'grees to accept de job I finds for you up Nawth, an' to pay back de railroad fare out of your wages. When you lands on de job, you 'grees to stick for a year. Make yo' mark right here. Sis' Callie, you widness on de paper—he's tetched de pen."

The proprietress duly scrawled her name as witness.

"We leaves in a speshual coach on de 'Azoo Valley train goin' Nawth to-night at seben twenty. I'll 'tend to everything an' take your folks to de deepo. You ain't give me de 'nitiation fee yit."

Jim hastily counted it out from his depleted supply. Then, personally escorted by Sanhedrin Tibbs, the Jacksons went to the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley station, down on the water front. Tibbs became active, corralling and collecting families together, counting noses and herding the crowd. In all, there were thirty-two families in the party.

"Well, I'm goin' to order our speshual coach now. We gits in, de train folks hooks us onto de fast train, an' bingo, we's headed Nawth!" exulted Tibbs.

"Dat's de stuff—gwine Nawth!" ejaculated a middle-aged black man wearing big spectacles and carrying a Bible, to show that he was of the ministerial persuasion. "Gwine Nawth—to de Promise' Land!"

"I hopes de Los' Tribe of Isrul don't have as hard a time as dem yuther tribes what traipsed around fer fawty yeahs," commented a woman.

"Moses didn't have no steam cyars!" shrilled a yellow girl, who giggled excitedly. "We'll git there!"

The train roared into the station from New Orleans. A cautious switch engine puffed in from the yards, with a coach dimly lighted by kerosene lamps, and coupled it on to the rear of the train. Sanhedrin Tibbs bustled out of the depot, all importance, with executiveness oozing from every pore.

"Git aboard now, folks! Dis is our speshual coach. Climb in! Hurry up, now—I got our tickets all 'ranged!"

The Jim Jacksons had never ridden on a train before. To them, the faded, plum-colored cushions were the acme of luxury, and the smoky lamps a most brilliant illumination—part of the magical contraption of some jinni. When the train actually began to glide forward, Lucy could not contain herself. Her voice rose in a shrill, triumphant pean of victory:

"I am bound fer de Promise' La-a-a-and,

I am bound fer de Promise' La-and!

Oh, who will come an' go wid me-e-e-e?

I am bound fer de Promise' Land!"

It was infectious. Other voices took it up—basses and tenors, with the high, shrill,

attenuated notes of the young girls flashing above the rest in a crescendo of barbaric harmony.

"Headed Nawth fer de Promise' Lan'—praise de Lawd!" shouted a man, and it set them singing again.

### VIII

THE music subsided after a while, the gabble of excited voices gradually died down, and children ceased whimpering. Unaccustomed to the motion, members of the party were succumbing to overpowering drowsiness.

Mile after mile was ripped off by the train, with few stops. Sanhedrin Tibbs dozed and nodded in the forward corner seat, but never lost consciousness.

The night wore on. Profound slumber had thrown its mantle of oblivion over the crowded car. In cramped, unnatural postures, the men, women, and children sprawled. One o'clock—two o'clock—three o'clock—the train drove on, headed northward.

It stopped after a while, backed up a bit, and then there was a long silence, broken only by the snores and sleep moans of the slumberers.

Lights guttered dimly, for through open windows rolled a dense fog, making an opaque and milky world outside. A man waked and roused to sitting posture. He was near the sanhedrin.

"Bre'r Tibbs, dis yer train sho' do ride easy!" he commented.

Sanhedrin Tibbs nodded, in drowsy disinclination for talk.

"Looky hyar, man, is we movin' or ain't we?" persisted the questioner, after a few minutes.

"Dunno," grunted Tibbs, seemingly in utter indifference.

"I believe we's stopped," insisted the man.

"Sho' is!" commented his wife, sticking her head out of the window. "Sho' is stopped!" she repeated, as if making a great discovery. "Is dis de Nawth?"

Time dragged interminably for the sanhedrin during the next few minutes.

"Believe I'll go out on de flatform an' look aroun'," suggested the discoverer of the easy motion.

He disentangled himself from several sleeping children, and made his way to the door. It was locked. He traversed the aisle and went to the other door. Locked!

"Look hyar, folks, we's locked in, an' de yuther part of de train is went off an' left us!" he bawled excitedly.

Heads popped up—eyes popped out.

"Says which?" demanded the exhorter.

"De train done run off an' left us!"

"Oh, shut up!" commented Sanhedrin Tibbs, with vast disgust. "De engine just gone off after coal an' water. Sit down, you dern fool country niggers! You ain't never traveled nowhar, an' you don't know nothin'. De train 'll be comin' back to git us. Knowin' you was a pack of chuckleheads, I locked de doors myself to keep you from goin' out an' fallin' off de flatform an' gittin' kilt. Here's de key!" He held it up in triumph. "Take a nap, you folks—like I is."

He ostentatiously settled himself back and closed his eyes.

The passengers subsided. In the face of such crushing superior knowledge there was nothing else to do.

Half an hour passed. The world grew lighter, but the fog held on.

"I'll go out an' see 'bout de engine, an' see whar we is at," advised Brother Tibbs, suiting his action to the word.

He unlocked the door, and carefully locked it again when he was out on the platform. Then the fog swallowed him.

"Whar you reckon we is, Jim?" asked Lucy.

"I dunno. I'll be plumb satcherfied wharever it's at."

"Huh—I dunno!" Lucy sniffed.

Suddenly Tibbs bounced up on the rear platform, apparently out of nowhere. He seemed greatly agitated. He called through the upper part of the door, where the sash had been let down.

"Hey, you folks, 'tenshun! Lissen to this telegram what I has just been handed:

"MR. WASHINGTON TIBBS, SUPREME EXALTED SANHEDRIN. ESTEEMED SIR:

"A terrible accident has happened. The rest of the train of your party is run off the bridge into the Miss. River and drowned everybody. The bridge is busted and wrecked. It cannot be repaired for two weeks, and there will be no more trains. It was a mistake that the train did not go back and get your car. The conductor forgot it, which is a mercy, or you-all would have woke up dead. Sorry to delay you, but make out the best you can, and in two weeks we will pick up your car again."

"Respy,

"JOHN W. SMITH, General Supt. and Prest."

"Lawdy mussy! Jes' think what we missed!" squalled a woman.

Men surged to the door, and Tibbs handed the telegram in to them. That it was typewritten on a sending blank, and had pocket-worn creases, was not noticed.

"Sho' is a tellegraft—says 'zackly what he read!" declared the exhorter in spectacles, who was a scholar, and spelled it out.

The other travelers surged about him, and he had to read it over and over again. They gloated in its horrors.

"Well, hyar we is! We got to make 'rangements to live till de railroad bridge is fixed. I'll go see what I kin do."

Tibbs vanished again. In about fifteen minutes he returned.

"I told you folks I'd take you Nawth, didn't I?" he demanded through the upper part of the locked door.

"Sho' did!" answered several.

"Well, dis is a hundred and fifty miles nawth of Vicksburg. I can't fly you, an' I can't make trains run over busted bridges. Some genelmuns out here will hire you, part time cash as wages hands, part time your

own share crops—good schools, church, plenty rations, good houses. Looks like it's take dis or starve. You-all 'pointed me to do dat when you signed up wid de Los' Tribe, so I done signed up for a year. Come on out, you folks, an' meet your new 'payers!"

Bewildered, the negroes filed from the car. Four white men were standing near the steps. The fog was lifting.

Jim Jackson and his family trooped out, sleepy, stupid, wool-gathering. Jim paused in front of one of the men, and stood with his mouth open.

"Welcome, Jim! Hope you had a nice trip and a good vacation! Come on—there's a wagon waiting to take you over to Ellerslie. I think you'll be satisfied now!"

Jim gulped as he looked into the amused face of Colonel Bolivar Redmond.

"Howdy, cunnel? Yassir, I knows I will—sho' will. Sho' I's missed you!" he replied ingratiatingly, as he shuffled toward the waiting wagon.

### INVIOULATE

"How shall I face the bandit years,  
That threaten robbery and death?  
How shall I strip them of the fears  
With which they poison every breath?"  
I asked, and thought perhaps their greed  
With gold to still. In vain I tried;  
They mocked the bribe, nor checked their speed.  
"We'll take your youth, instead!" they cried.

In work I sought to find the way  
To render them my slaves, to wring  
Obedience to my will and stay  
The beating of their restless wing.  
But though in work I might awhile  
Forget their insolence, 'twas vain;  
They took my hope, and left it vile—  
The labor of my hands and brain.  
I had not thought of love, but when  
Love came, I found I held the key  
To help me win from them again  
The youth and hope they'd filched from me.  
And though the loved one they may take,  
There's something that escapes their clutch;  
The heart of love perhaps may break,  
But love itself they cannot touch!

William Wallace Whitelock



# A Dinner of Disenchantment

PROVING THAT A MEAL MAY BE SPICED WITH FLIRTATION  
AND YET REMAIN TASTELESS

By Marian Graham

"DID you ever see such absolutely improper devotion?" demanded Sheila Fraser, crossing her legs, to reveal a glimpse of a neatly rolled stocking, and waving the cigarette holder with which she habitually punctuated her remarks.

"Bad taste, I call it, really!" observed Mary Cavendish, in an accent as nearly British as three hundred years of American ancestry would allow.

The man with whom they were teasing, on the veranda of the Grantchester Country Club, looked up to see whom they were gossiping about now. A smart car had drawn up before the clubhouse, and a good-looking man with a rather serious smile had left the wheel to greet a pretty young woman who had run down to meet him. They seemed unaffectedly glad to see each other, and they kissed unashamedly before the very eyes of their critics.

Then the man assisted the woman into the car with that tender courtesy so different from the kind that springs solely from convention, and again took the wheel. As the car moved off, the man on the veranda decided that the pretty young woman sighed contentedly, as she leaned as close as she could to her escort.

"Charming, I think," he said mildly, turning to the others.

"Why, Bruce Dexter, don't be so common!" Mary exclaimed. "It's positively mid-Victorian for a man to be so devoted to his wife; and for a wife to return the same full measure of devotion is—well, Freudian!"

"Oh, they're married, then!" said Bruce. "More charming than ever. It's so rare as to be unconventional."

"Heavens, you are old-fashioned! It isn't as if they had just met after a year's separation. This happens almost every

day, and the worst of it is that they really seem to enjoy it. How any two civilized people can so cut themselves off from everything and everybody is beyond me!"

Sheila shrugged her shoulders. Mary took up the attack.

"Yes, and only a few years ago, before marriage made them quite impossible, they were delightful. Stella was the liveliest girl in the set, and Tom was always ready to go. Now they never do anything except play tennis together, golf together, ride together, motor together—"

"If they're happy, why do you care?" Dexter interrupted.

"Bruce, don't be sentimental! Think of society! Think of one's duty to one's fellows, and all that sort of thing! What did we fight the war for? I say that couples like the Sterlings are a dangerous, oligarchic menace. Think of a world composed of such people! Why, nothing would ever get done. There would be no coöperation anywhere—no community spirit."

"And no country clubs," observed Dexter, with quiet irony.

"Certainly not."

"Think of a world without country clubs!" he went on mournfully. "It would be too utopian. I mean—"

"You're being clever, Bruce Dexter. I know what 'utopian' means, if Sheila doesn't," accused Mary; "but everybody knows you're a bolshevik at heart."

"I don't care what it means," Sheila insisted; "but I do say that happy marriages are undermining society."

The happily married menace—otherwise Tom and Stella Sterling—furnished the country clubbers with a daily topic of conversation. Grantchester is one of those communities where the residents have noth-

ing to do, plenty of time, and little to think about. Every one is scrupulously observant of every one else's clothes, car, home, and social life. Every one is religiously unhappy, often in defiance of nature, and a blasé boredom is considered the grand manner. Enthusiasm of any kind violates a sacred taboo.

For five years Tom and Stella Sterling had been happily married. The longest previous record in what was contemptuously called the endurance contest was three years. Divorce, downright infidelity, or at least flirtation, was the accepted thing. Happily married people were cordially disliked, because they bored everybody but themselves.

## II

SHEILA FRASER and Mary Cavendish would have been astonished, as well as gratified, if they had known that even as they subjected the Sterlings to their well bred scorn, Tom was contemplating an indiscretion. They had almost given up hope; but that very afternoon, before leaving the office, Tom had answered a jingling telephone, and had heard the voice of a girl whose name and face he had kept locked in his heart for many years.

When the smart Grantchester folk had jollied him for his lack of human susceptibility, and had waxed sarcastic because of his devotion to Stella, he had smiled knowingly and thought of Ilonka. Ilonka constituted Tom's purple past. If he had not had her to think about, the perpetual public scorn of his love for Stella might have driven him to the acquisition of a more recent if less colorful madness.

Everything about Ilonka was colorful, even her rich, throaty voice. When she had called Sterling on the telephone that afternoon, her "Hello, Tom!" had been as lingering and dulcet as any message the wires had ever carried—quite a contrast to the crisp girlishness of Stella. Ilonka was—well, caressing. Stella was straightforward.

Ilonka was so different from Tom that she had won his love, years before. Stella was so like him, and yet so complementary, that she, too, had won his love; but Stella had been his wife for five years. Ilonka had been his fiancée for four months, and Ilonka had the advantage of more than six years' absence.

If the Sterlings had lived anywhere but

in Grantchester, Tom would probably have forgotten Ilonka; but such a premium was placed upon devilishness that the sound of her voice had sent a delightful, tickling sensation up and down his spine. His past had returned to him, more glamorous than ever. He had not been allowed to forget her, and now, as he rode beside Stella, he was glad that Ilonka had not forgotten him.

He had joyously made a dinner engagement with her. They were to dine, tomorrow evening, in one of their old haunts, where garish but respectable Grantchester would never find them. Speaking with Ilonka, it had been easy to forget Stella. Now it was difficult; and it was even harder to explain to his wife that he was dining out with a friend.

Tom could count the times he had not dined with Stella, during those five years, on the fingers of one hand. He had never wanted to dine with any one else before. Stella was far too charming a companion for that.

He was tempted to put off telling her until the next day. It would then be easy to telephone to her, and to present the stereotyped excuse that fell so glibly from the lips of the other men of Grantchester—a business associate, in the city overnight, had to be entertained. Stella would believe it, of course, as she believed everything he told her; but for that very reason it seemed a bit cowardly.

"Anything doing to-morrow night?" he asked, after they had ridden a long way in silence.

"The Garfield dance," said Stella. "I thought we'd go there for just a little while—they'll expect that much—and then go home; but if you would rather not—"

"Fact is, dear, I was planning to stay in town." The lie fell easily into the place that Stella's words had made for it. "A chap came in from the Seattle office to-day, and he rather expects me to entertain him. Thought I'd take him to dinner to-morrow, and to a show, and get away as soon as I can. I'd rather take you"—it hurt him to say that now, but he was in the habit of being affectionate and saying so—"but, you see he's not just the right sort. Pretty crude!"

"Oh, that's all right, beloved. Then I'll stay home and read until you come—if you're not too late. I don't want to go to the Garfields', but people are beginning

to forget to invite us. That's the curse of being happily married. No one knows how we do it!"

Stella's happy, girlish laughter stung Tom—he was such an inexperienced trickster—and for the first time the confiding pressure of her hand on his arm annoyed him.

Still, he reflected conscientiously, he was not altogether a liar. There was a man from Seattle, and he did expect to be entertained, and he was a bit crude. That much was true; but for just a moment Tom wished he had said, quite frankly:

"Stella, an old flame of mine turned up to-day. I haven't seen her in six years. Once we were engaged. I'm curious—and intrigued, rather. I'm taking her to dinner to-morrow—do you mind?"

He thought he knew what Stella would reply:

"Of course not, dear! Only you must promise to tell me about it when you come home. Such meetings are always funny."

But if he did that, there would be no thrill in it, nothing to think about as a solace when the Grantchester rounders got sarcastic; and he had been hoarding his boyish memory of Ilonka for a long time.

### III

SUNDRY annoying business problems were presented to Tom Sterling the next day, but he did not solve them with his usual clear, concentrated assurance. Indeed, he found it impossible to concentrate. He was looking forward to the dinner with feverish anticipation, and with an equally feverish fear that Stella would learn of it.

He despised himself for deceiving her, and then tried to shake off that feeling with a smirk of self-satisfaction in his devilishness; but he was ill cast for the rôle of philanderer, and his forthright mind had not been tutored in the school of deceit.

He perspired freely when he called up Signora Mori and ordered dinner in a semi-private booth. He had not seen the *signora* for a long time, but she remembered him at once. She also remembered Stella.

"Ah, Mr. Sterling, you dine with me once more! With the charming Mrs. Sterling, is it?" A romantic Italian laugh came from the *signora's* broad bosom. "A long time—perhaps once more you capture romance, here in my little place!"

"No, *signora*, it is not Mrs. Sterling, but some one else. Perhaps you remember,

if you have not discreetly forgotten. It is Ilonka—"

"Oh!" In that monosyllable were mingled disapproval, reproach, scorn, and discretion, for first of all Signora Mori was a hostess. "Very well, it will be arranged."

The receiver clicked while Tom was still listening.

"Gee!" he muttered. "Maybe I shouldn't go to Mori's."

And yet Ilonka was inseparably linked, in his memory, with the little Italian restaurant. His youth was there, and all of the dreams that had been his in those gay, care-free days when nothing mattered but dinner, a bottle of wine, and the particular "thou" who shared it with him. It seemed a long, long time ago, after five years of dreamless, commonplace Grantchester.

Bill Murray, the man from Seattle, entered his office like a blast of wind across Puget Sound. Tom was still dubious from the telephone conversation, but Bill slapped him on the back, called him "old scout," thrust a cigar at him, and made himself comfortable on the other side of the desk.

"Well, Tom, old-timer!" he exploded. "We've done a fine year's business out in God's country, and everything's settled for another one bigger yet. That's what I say—double the sales every year; and we'll do it out there. We've got the organization and the pep to put it over; but, say, all work and no play, you know! I like little old Manhattan a lot. What do you say to a night of it, hey? Come on, the old man just slipped me a bonus that 'll make a noise even in this town. Let's go!"

Another slap on the back brought Tom back to earth.

"Eh? What did you say? Oh, about that Hampton contract—"

"Never mind that, old dear! I'll land Hampton. What I say is, let's go out and licker up. Let's have one good old time. It's my party—one night of freedom before I go back to Seattle and the wife!"

A prodigious wink and a moist revolution of the fat cigar followed this suggestion.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Bill," Tom stammered; "but really I—I can't make it. You see—you see, this is my wedding anniversary, and I've really got to go home. You know how those things are—big celebration and everything!"

He sighed heavily after getting it out. How the deuce could he lie so easily? Perhaps it was because he was thinking of

Stella, and wishing he was really going home. Anyway—

"Well, that's tough on me, Tom! Darn it, I was counting on a great time. I only see New York once a year. Well, maybe I can stir up a little party on my own, hey?"

Murray had already got up. Tom was heartily glad to be rid of him; but it wasn't exactly good business to treat him this way. He would probably expect to be invited to the anniversary affair, at least.

"Oh, I say, Bill, I'd ask you to come out, but I don't think there'll be much jazz in the party. It's a dull crowd out there. Here's an idea—you go and see Stanton, in the advertising department. There's the boy to show you the sights, a lot better than an old married man like me. That's the stuff!"

"That's fine; I'll do that. We'll have a party yet. Say, Tom, if we get jailed or anything, bail us out, will you? I'm off!"

"I'm sorry I can't make it, Bill, but you know—"

"Sure, I know. Don't I have one of those anniversaries every year myself?"

#### IV

DURING the rest of that awful day, Tom was tempted more than once to phone to Ilonka and call it off. Only his pride prevented him, and his fear of what the Grantchester fellows would say if they should ever learn about it.

He got through the day somehow, and presented himself at Ilonka's apartment hotel at half past six. She met him in the foyer, bundled in a shapeless mass of leopard skin coat, and gave him a gloved hand. He held it for a long moment, because he knew she expected him to, and pressed it warmly. She returned his pressure boldly, and still clung to his hand as they went out of doors and into the taxi.

"Tom, dear!" she sighed, as the taxi moved forward. "It has been so very long, my own, and I see tired lines in your face. Oh, Tom!"

She swayed toward him, and her free hand stroked his arm. Tom felt no emotion, but he was uncomfortable.

"Yes," he agreed stupidly. "It has been a long time, Ilonka. I'm awfully glad to see you again."

"Only glad? Oh, *mon cher!* I am so very happy to be with you!"

It wasn't at all chivalrous of Tom to think so, but nevertheless the thought came that Ilonka had used those very words many times before. How else could she give them that too perfect inflection?

"Yes, it's great!" he said, but there wasn't any inflection in his tone.

"Aren't you going to kiss me, dearest?"

Ilonka turned her face up to his, and managed the difficult feat, in a jolting taxi, of placing her hand upon his shoulder, so that it would not disarrange her coiffure and would at the same time achieve the proper kissing angle.

"Why—why, sure!"

He bent down to kiss her cheek, but Ilonka took his face in her hands and brought his lips to hers. As their lips met, Tom had the feeling that the kiss was only of the lips. It wasn't real, like Stella's.

He was relieved when the car halted before the dim entrance to Mori's, and he accomplished a fair imitation of gayety as he helped Ilonka out. The *signora* met them just inside, and led them to their booth. She displayed no more cordiality toward Tom than was necessary and toward Ilonka none at all. The place seemed to Tom far less charming than of old.

He helped Ilonka out of her leopard skin—why would she wear furs like that?—and beheld her in a startlingly low-cut gown of black velvet. The gown made him uncomfortable. He saw that Ilonka's long neck had lost its fine lines, and her shoulders had become too plump. She was not at all the girl he had cherished in his memory—that slender, tigerish creature of flame and color. No, she was becoming plump; but she still affected tigerish gowns. He felt that he might be looking at the mother of that lithe, graceful creature whom he had once loved.

Had he loved her? It all began to seem distant and hazy, much more vague than the reality of his dream of her.

His card was on file at Mori's—which is another way of saying that he could buy liquor there at the current prices; but one cocktail was enough, surely, and there was no reason for Ilonka having two, especially when she had not indulged years ago.

He looked at her more critically after the cocktails. He couldn't help it. The curve of her lips wasn't so firmly molded as it had been, and her eyes had lost their bright, enthusiastic glow. After two drinks, though, they began to sparkle.



What should they talk about? Yesterday he had dreamed of so many things to say to her; but now he sat silent, with a fixed smile that he tried to keep from being cynical, and looked at her.

She reached across the table and took his hand, pressing it. He noted that the arm she held out was soft and fat. He couldn't help thinking of the white, firm, girlish arms of Stella—muscle in tennis and golf, yet soft and round and tender as those of a mother. He could always find something to talk about with Stella, or they could be silent together without being at all uncomfortable.

## V

"TELL me, Tom dear"—Ilonka broke the silence as she fished an olive out of her second cocktail—"have you suffered as I have suffered for all the things we left undone?"

How was he to answer that? If he were candid, he would be contemptible. He hesitated, and then began to lie as gracefully as he could. My, but he was lying a lot to-day!

"Yes," he confessed. "I have thought of you often, and of the old days when we were together so much."

His words sounded lifeless to him, but Ilonka took them up at once.

"Oh, my poor Tom! How often I have yearned for you! How much I have suffered! Through Europe and South America, wherever I have sung, during the two years that I have spent out West, in San Francisco and Seattle, with that terrible opera company! How I have missed you! How often I have regretted that we did not marry! We came so close to it, my own!"

"Yes, we did—and now I am married," he announced for her information, although she knew it, and also as a defense against a renewed attack.

"Ah, yes—I have heard of it. It is too bad, too. You must have been so unhappy with your little bourgeoisie. Some one out West—let me see, it was in Seattle, I think—yes, a man named Murray told me of it. I knew him very well, and he consoled me in my unhappiness. Tom, I wept, wept!"

"Murray—of Seattle? What's his first name?"

"Billy, I used to call him. Billy! He was very kind to me, after I knew you were married—very kind."

Tom felt the need of a third cocktail, but contented himself with Chianti. So she knew Bill Murray, and he had been very kind to her! Of course, Bill was all right in his way—a good business man, and all that; but Tom couldn't imagine—well, he couldn't imagine Stella allowing a man like Bill Murray to be kind to her, ever.

"Why don't you sit beside me—as you used to? You seem so far away!"

Tom got up heavily and took his place beside Ilonka. She leaned against him caressingly, and her arm slipped up over his shoulder. He removed it and kissed her hand, holding it in his, to prevent further embraces.

Then he began to talk, in an attempt to awaken her interest in something else. He tried music, first, out of deference to her profession; but he found that she knew little of music, except gossip about other professionals whom she disliked or envied. Then he tried plays, but she was only interested in the current divorces of the theatrical world. Books she never read, and her talk of them was most inane.

Tom gave it up, and drank a great deal more than he wanted. It had the effect of making him very solemn, and he began to make mordant, cynical remarks that were not at all nice, in response to Ilonka's elaborate expressions of devotion. They succeeded in boring each other remarkably well, and Signora Mori, passing by now and then as the meal progressed, smiled in benign satisfaction.

## VI

THEY were both relieved when a noisy uproar in another part of the dining room gave them something besides each other to listen to. Boisterous songs were coming from a booth on the other side of the room. Tom and Ilonka simultaneously recognized one of the voices. It was unmistakably like a Puget Sound foghorn, and belonged to no one but Bill Murray.

"Billy!" cried Ilonka, immediately forgetting her passion for Tom.

"My God!" groaned Tom, full of remorse and good resolutions.

The foghorn of Puget Sound had heard. Now he descended upon them, saw Ilonka, and slapped her heartily on her bare, fat shoulder.

"Onky, ol' girl, this is a mos' agreeable surprise! I'm delighted—delighted, my dear!"

Murray put a possessive arm across her shoulders, and tried to bring her to her feet. Instead, he sank down beside her. Then he discovered the presence of Tom Sterling.

"Aha, Tommy! This is the way you celebrate wedding an'vers'ry! Aha! Don't blame you a bit! Didn't I celebrate mine las' year in the company of Onky?"

To prove it, he leaned over and kissed her. She swayed against him, and laughed heartily.

Tom felt helpless and sick. He wanted to get out of the place, he wanted to go home. He pulled out his watch and muttered something.

"Ilonka, I've really got to go," he announced. "Last train, you know. Shall I take you home now, or shall—"

Ilonka looked up at him with a glass in her hand.

"Say, do you think I'd leave now?" she demanded. "With Billy just getting here, and the night still young? I should say not! Good-by, old thing, good-by!"

Tom touched her hand, bowed to Murray, and left the booth. As he went he heard a loud smack, followed by the words—

"Good riddance!"

He almost ran from the place, pulling out a bill for Signora Mori on the way.

The *signora* took the bill and bade him good night.

"And you will bring Mrs. Sterling some time?" she said. "I should like to see her again. She is a very fine girl."

"You bet! And say, *signora*, don't let any one know about this—this—will you?"

"Oh, I shall be discreet, and so will you, I think, hereafter!"

"I'm never going to eat another meal unless Stella's with me," said Tom.

With that he plunged out into the street, caught a taxi, and fled to the station. He had to get home to Stella, he had to tell her what a fool he had been. He hoped she was still up reading. The Grantchester crowd could all go to the devil. He never wanted to talk to any woman but Stella!

The veranda veterans were again in session at the Grantchester Country Club. The affair of the season was approaching, and Sheila Fraser and Mary Cavendish were out to make it a huge success. One of their problems was the coaching and staging of a pageant, and they ran through the list of club members to select the right person to do it.

"Stella Sterling, of course!" exclaimed Sheila. "Why didn't I think of her before? No one could do it so well. Do you remember—"

"But haven't you heard?" whispered Mary, in the tone that gossips reserve for exclusive news.

"Scandal? Oh, tell me!"

"Scandal? My dear, the very worst we have ever had in Grantchester! Oh, the Sterlings will be ostracized, that's all there is to it. And you haven't heard?"

"Don't be dramatic—tell me! Of course I haven't heard."

"Well—well," began Mary, hesitating to the full limit of suspense, "Tom and Stella have gone to Florida on their yearly honeymoon!"

## VESPERS

THERE are so many ways of saying

That I love you—

The tender deed to fit the praying,

The bond when dark blots out the blue;

The honest heart wherein are straying

The searching tendrils of the true.

There are so many ways of proving

That love is all—

The patient living and the loving,

The breathless answer to a call;

The pulse of evening, faintly moving

When sparrows fall.

Olin Lyman

# It Came Out of Egypt

A SERIES OF SIX MYSTERIES FROM THE LAND OF THE NILE

By Sax Rohmer

Author of "Dr. Fu-Manchu," "The Golden Scorpion," etc.

## THIRD MYSTERY—THE BATS OF MEYDUM

**S**ALUTING each of the three in turn, the tall Egyptian passed from Dr. Cairn's room. Upon his exit there followed a brief but electric silence. Dr. Cairn's face was very stern, and Sime, with his hands locked behind him, stood staring out of the window into the palm-shaded garden of the hotel.

Robert Cairn looked excitedly from one to the other.

"What did he say, sir?" he cried, addressing his father. "It had something to do with—"

Dr. Cairn turned toward his son. Sime did not move.

"Yes," replied the doctor. "It had something to do with the matter which has brought me to Cairo."

"You see," said Robert, "my knowledge of Arabic, I regret to say, is practically nothing."

Sime now turned in his slow and heavy fashion, and directed a dull gaze upon the last speaker.

"Ali Mohammed," he explained slowly, "who has just left, had come down from the Fayum to report a singular matter. He was unaware of its real importance, but it was sufficiently unusual to disturb him, and Ali Mohammed es Suefi is not easily disturbed."

Dr. Cairn dropped into an armchair, nodding toward Sime.

"Tell him all that we have heard," he said. "Of course, we stand together in this affair."

"Well," continued Sime, in his deliberate fashion, "when we struck our camp beside the Pyramid of Meydum, Ali Mo-

hammed remained behind, with a gang of workmen, to finish off some comparatively unimportant work. He is an unemotional person. Fear is alien to his composition. It has no meaning for him; but last night something occurred at the camp—or what remained of the camp—which seems to have shaken even Ali Mohammed's iron nerve."

Robert Cairn nodded, watching the speaker intently.

"The entrance to the Meydum Pyramid—" continued Sime.

"One of the entrances," interrupted Dr. Cairn, smiling slightly.

"There is only one entrance," said Sime dogmatically.

Dr. Cairn waved his hand.

"Go ahead," he said. "We shall have time to discuss these archaeological details later."

Sime stared dully, but went on without further comment.

"The camp was situated on the slope immediately below the only known entrance to the Meydum Pyramid. One might say that it lay in the shadow of the building. There are tumuli in the neighborhood—part of a prehistoric cemetery—and it was work in connection with this which had detained Ali Mohammed in that part of the Fayum. Last night, about ten o'clock, he reports, he was awakened by an unusual sound, or series of sounds. He came out of the tent into the moonlight, and looked up at the pyramid. The entrance was a good way above his head, of course, and quite fifty or sixty yards from the point where he was standing; but the moon-

beams bathed that side of the building in dazzling light, so that he was enabled to see a swarm of bats whirling out of the pyramid."

"Bats?" ejaculated Robert Cairn.

"Yes. There is a small colony of bats in this pyramid, of course; but the bat does not hunt in bands, and the sight of these bats flying out from the place was one which Ali Mohammed had never witnessed before. Their concerted squeaking was very clearly audible. He could not believe that it was this which had awakened him, and which had awakened the ten or twelve workmen who also slept in the camp, for these men were now clustering around him, and all looking up at the side of the pyramid. Fayum nights are strangely still. Except for the jackals and the village dogs, and a few other sounds to which one grows accustomed, there is nothing—absolutely nothing—audible. In this stillness, then, the flapping of the bats made quite a disturbance overhead. Some of the men were only half awake, but most of them were badly frightened. They began to compare notes, with the result that they determined upon the exact nature of the sound that had aroused them. It seemed almost certain that this had been a dreadful scream—the scream of a woman in her last agony."

He paused, looking from Dr. Cairn to his son, with a singular expression upon his habitually immobile face.

"Go on," said Robert Cairn.

Slowly Sime resumed.

"The bats had begun to disperse in various directions, but the panic which had seized upon the camp does not seem to have subsided so readily. Ali Mohammed confesses that he himself felt almost afraid—a remarkable admission for a man of his class to make. Picture these fellows, then, standing looking at one another, and very frequently up at the opening in the side of the pyramid. Then the smell began to reach their nostrils—the smell which completed the panic, and which led to the abandonment of the camp."

"The smell? What kind of smell?" jerked Robert Cairn.

Dr. Cairn turned himself in his chair, looking fully at his son.

"I know that odor—it is the smell of Hades, boy!" he said grimly, and turned away again.

"Naturally," continued Sime, "I can

give you no particulars on that point; but it must have been something very fearful to have affected the Egyptian native. There was no breeze, but it swept down upon them, this poisonous smell, as if borne by a hot wind."

"Was the exhalation actually hot?" Robert Cairn inquired.

"I cannot say. But Ali Mohammed is positive that it came from the opening in the pyramid. It was not in disgust, apparently, but in sheer, stark horror, that the whole crowd of them turned tail and ran. They never stopped and never looked back until they came to Rekka, on the railway."

"That was last night?" questioned Cairn, after a short silence.

His father nodded.

"The man came in by the first train from Wasta," he said. "We have not a moment to spare!"

Sime stared at him.

"I don't understand—"

"I have a mission," said Dr. Cairn quietly. "It is to run to earth, to stamp out, as I would stamp out a pestilence, a certain thing—I cannot call it a man—Antony Ferrara. I believe, Sime, that you are at one with me in this matter?"

Sime drummed his fingers upon the table, frowning thoughtfully, and looking from one to the other of his companions under his lowered brows.

"With my own eyes," he said, "I have seen something of this secret drama which has brought you, Dr. Cairn, to Egypt; and, up to a point, I agree with you regarding Antony Ferrara. You have lost all trace of him?"

"Since leaving Port Said," said Dr. Cairn, "I have seen and heard nothing of him; but Lady Lashmore, who was an intimate—and an innocent victim, God help her!—of Ferrara in London, after staying at the Semiramis in Cairo for one day, departed. Where did she go?"

"What has Lady Lashmore to do with the matter?" asked Sime.

"If what I fear be true—" began Dr. Cairn, and broke off. "But I anticipate. At the moment it is enough for me that, unless my information is at fault, Lady Lashmore left Cairo by the Luxor train at half past eight o'clock yesterday."

Robert Cairn looked in a puzzled way at his father.

"What do you suspect, sir?" he said.



"I suspect that she went no farther than Wasta," replied Dr. Cairn.

"Still I do not understand," declared Sime.

"You may understand later," was the answer. "We must not waste a moment. You Egyptologists think that Egypt has little or nothing to teach you. The Pyramid of Meydum lost interest as soon as you learned that no treasure could be found in it. How little you know what it really contained, Sime! Mariette did not suspect. Sir Gaston Maspero does not suspect. The late Sir Michael Ferrara and I once camped by the Pyramid of Meydum, as you have camped there, and we made a discovery."

"Well?" prompted Sime, with growing interest.

"It is a point upon which my lips are sealed, but—do you believe in black magic?"

"I am not altogether sure that I do," replied Sime.

"Very well, you are entitled to your opinion; but although you appear to be ignorant of the fact, the Pyramid of Meydum was formerly one of the strongholds—the second greatest in all the land of the Nile—of ancient Egyptian sorcery. I pray Heaven I may be wrong, but in the disappearance of Lady Lashmore, and in the story of Ali Mohammed, I see a dreadful possibility. Ring for a time-table. We have not a moment to waste!"

## II

REKKA was a mile behind.

"It will take us an hour yet," said Dr. Cairn, "to reach the pyramid, although it appears so near."

Indeed, in the violet dusk, the great Pyramid of Meydum seemed already to loom above them, although it was quite four miles away. The narrow path along which they trotted their donkeys ran through the fertile lowlands of the Fayum. They had just passed a village, amid an angry chorus from the pariah dogs, and were now following the track along the top of the embankment.

Where the green carpet merged ahead into the gray ocean of sand the desert began, and out in that desert, resembling some weird work of nature rather than anything wrought by the hand of man, stood the gloomy and lonely building ascribed by the Egyptologists to the Pharaoh Snofru,

of the fourth dynasty, the predecessor of the great Cheops.

Dr. Cairn and his son rode ahead, and Sime, with Ali Mohammed, brought up the rear of the little company.

"I am completely in the dark, sir," said Robert Cairn, "respecting the object of our present journey. What leads you to suppose that we shall find Antony Ferrara here?"

"I scarcely hope to find him here," was the enigmatical reply; "but I am almost certain that he is here. I might have expected it, and I blame myself for not having provided against—this."

"Against what?"

"It is impossible, Rob, for you to understand this matter. Indeed, if I were to publish what I know—not what I imagine, but what I know—about the Pyramid of Meydum, I should not only call down upon myself the ridicule of every Egyptologist in Europe, but I should be accounted mad by the whole world."

His son was silent for a time.

"According to the guide books," he said at length, "it is merely an unfinished and empty tomb."

"It is empty, certainly," replied Dr. Cairn, "or the apartment known as the King's Chamber is now empty; but even the so-called King's Chamber was not empty once, and there is another chamber in the heart of the pyramid which is not empty now."

"If you know of the existence of such a chamber, sir, why have you kept it secret?" asked Robert Cairn.

"Because I cannot prove its existence. I do not know how to enter it, but I know it is there. I know what it was formerly used for, and I suspect that last night it was used for that same unholy purpose again, after a lapse of perhaps four thousand years. Even you would doubt me, I believe, if I were to tell you what I know, if I were to hint at what I suspect. No doubt, in your reading, you have met with Julian the Apostate?"

"Certainly, I have read of him. He is said to have practiced necromancy."

"When he was at Carra, in Mesopotamia, he retired to the Temple of the Moon, with a certain sorcerer and some others. His nocturnal operations concluded, he left the temple locked and the door sealed, and placed a guard over the gate. He was killed in battle, and never returned to Car-

ra; but when, in the reign of Jovian, the seal was broken and the temple opened, a body was found hanging by its hair. I will spare you the particulars. It was a case of that most awful form of sorcery—anthropomancy!"

An expression of horror had crept over Robert Cairn's face.

"Do you mean, sir, that this pyramid was used for similar purposes?"

"In the past it has been used for many purposes," was the quiet reply. "The exodus of the bats points to the fact that it was again used for one of those purposes last night—the exodus of the bats, and something else."

Sime, who had been listening to this strange conversation, cried out from the rear:

"We cannot reach it before sunset!"

"No," replied Dr. Cairn, turning in his saddle; "but that does not matter. Inside the pyramid, day and night make not the slightest difference."

Having crossed a narrow wooden bridge, they turned fully in the direction of the great ruin, pursuing a path along the opposite bank of the cutting. They rode in silence for some time, Robert Cairn deep in thought.

"I suppose that Antony Ferrara actually visited this place last night," he said suddenly; "although I cannot follow your reasoning. What leads you to suppose that he is there now?"

"This," answered his father slowly. "The purpose for which I believe him to have come here would detain him at least two days and two nights. I shall say no more about it, because, if I am wrong, or if for any reason I am unable to establish my suspicions as facts, you would certainly regard me as a madman if I had confided those suspicions to you."

Mounted upon donkeys, the journey from Rekka to the Pyramid of Meydum occupies fully an hour and a half. The glories of the sunset had merged into the violet dusk of Egypt before the party passed the outskirts of the cultivated land and came upon the desert sands. The mountainous pile of granite, its peculiar orange hue a ghastly yellow in the moonlight, now assumed truly monstrous proportions, seeming like a great square tower rising in three stages from its mound of sand to some three hundred and fifty feet above the level of the desert.

There is nothing more awesome than to find one's self at night, far from all fellow men, in the shadow of one of those edifices raised by unknown hands, by unknown means, to an unknown end; for, despite all the wisdom of our modern inquirers, these stupendous relics remain unsolved riddles set to posterity by a mysterious people of the past.

Neither Sime nor Ali Mohammed was of highly strung temperament. Neither was subject to those subtle impressions which more delicate organizations receive, as the nostrils receive an exhalation, from such a place; but Dr. Cairn and his son, though each in a different way, now came within the mysterious aura of this temple of the dead ages.

The great silence of the desert—a silence like no other in the world; the loneliness, which must be experienced to be appreciated, of that dry and tideless ocean; the traditions which had grown up like fungi about this venerable building; and, lastly, the knowledge that it was associated in some way with the sorcery, the unholy activity, of Antony Ferrara, combined to chill them with a supernatural dread which called for all their courage to combat.

"What now?" said Sime, descending from his mount.

"We must lead the donkeys up the slope," replied Dr. Cairn, "where those blocks of granite are, and tether them there."

In silence, then, the party commenced the tedious ascent of the mound by the narrow path to the top, until at about one hundred and twenty feet above the surrounding plain they found themselves actually under the wall of the mighty building. The donkeys were made fast.

"Sime and I," said Dr. Cairn quietly, "will enter the pyramid."

"But—" objected his son.

"Apart from the fatigue of the operation," continued the doctor, "the temperature in the lower part of the pyramid is so tremendous, and the air so bad, that in your present state of health it would be absurd for you to attempt it. Apart from this, there is a possibly more important task to be undertaken here, outside."

He turned his eyes upon Sime, who was listening intently.

"While we are penetrating to the interior by means of the sloping passage on the north side, Ali Mohammed and your-

self must mount guard on the south side of the pyramid."

"What for?" said Sime rapidly.

"For the reason," replied Dr. Cairn, "that there is an entrance to the first stage."

"But the first stage is nearly seventy feet above us. Even assuming that there is an entrance there—which I doubt—escape by that means would be impossible. No one could climb down the face of the pyramid from above; no one has ever succeeded in climbing up. For the purpose of surveying the pyramids, a scaffold had to be erected. Its sides are so steep that they are quite unscalable."

"That may be," agreed Dr. Cairn; "but, nevertheless, I have my reasons for placing a guard over the south side. If anything appears upon the stage above, Rob—*anything*—shoot, and shoot straight!"

He repeated the same instructions to Ali Mohammed, to the evident surprise of the latter.

"I don't understand at all," muttered Sime; "but as I presume you have a good reason for what you do, let it be as you propose. Can you give me any idea of what we may hope to find inside this place? I only entered once, and I am not anxious to repeat the experiment. The air is unbreathable, the descent to the level passage below is stiff work, and, apart from the inconvenience of navigating the lower passage—which, as you probably know, is only sixteen inches high—the climb up the vertical shaft into the tomb is not a particularly safe one. I exclude the possibility of snakes," he added ironically.

"You have also omitted the possibility of Antony Ferrara," said Dr. Cairn.

"Pardon my skepticism, doctor, but I cannot imagine any man voluntarily remaining in that awful place."

"Yet I am greatly mistaken if he is not there!"

"Then he is trapped!" Sime observed grimly, examining a Browning pistol which he carried. "Unless—"

He stopped, and an expression, almost of fear, crept over his stoical features.

"That sixteen-inch passage," he muttered, "with Antony Ferrara at the farther end!"

"Exactly!" said Dr. Cairn. "But I consider it my duty to the world to proceed. I warn you that you are about to face what is probably the greatest peril you will ever

be called upon to encounter. I do not ask you to do this. I am quite prepared to go alone."

"That remark was wholly unnecessary, doctor," said Sime, rather truculently. "I suggest that the other two should proceed to their post."

"But, sir—" began Robert Cairn.

"You know the way," said the doctor, with an air of finality. "There is not a moment to waste. Although I fear that we are already too late, it is just possible we may be in time to prevent a dreadful crime."

The tall Egyptian and Robert Cairn went stumbling off among the heaps of rubbish and broken masonry, until an angle of the great wall concealed them from view. Then the two who remained continued the climb yet higher, following the narrow, zig-zag path leading up to the entrance of the descending passage. Immediately under the square black hole they stood and glanced at each other.

"We may as well leave our outer garments here," said Sime. "I note that you wear rubber-soled shoes. I shall remove my boots, as otherwise I should be unable to obtain any foothold."

Dr. Cairn nodded, and without more ado proceeded to strip off his coat—an example which was followed by Sime. It was as he stooped and placed his hat upon the little bundle of clothes at his feet that the physician detected something which caused him to stoop yet lower, and to peer at a small, dark object on the ground with a strange intentness.

"What is it?" jerked Sime, glancing back at him.

Dr. Cairn, from a hip pocket, took out an electric lamp, and directed the white ray upon something lying on the splintered fragments of granite.

It was a bat, a fairly large one, and a clot of blood marked the place where its head had been; for the creature of the night had been decapitated!

As if anticipating what he would find there, Dr. Cairn flashed the ray of the lamp all about the ground in the vicinity of the entrance to the pyramid. Scores of dead bats, headless, lay there.

"For God's sake, what does this mean?" whispered Sime, glancing apprehensively into the black entrance beside him.

"It means," answered Cairn, in a low voice, "that my suspicion, almost incred-

ible though it seems, was well founded. Steel yourself against the task that is before you, Sime. We stand upon the borderland of strange horrors."

Sime hesitated to touch any of the dead bats, surveying them with an ill concealed repugnance.

"What kind of creature," he whispered, "has done this?"

"One of a kind that the world has not known for many ages—the most evil kind of creature conceivable—a man devil!"

"But what does he want with bats' heads?"

"The cynonycteris, or pyramid bat, has a leaflike appendage beside the nose. A gland in this secretes a rare oil. This oil is one of the ingredients of the mysterious incense which is never named in the magical writings."

Sime shuddered.

"Here," said Dr. Cairn, proffering a flask. "This is only the overture. No nerves!"

The other nodded shortly, and poured out a peg of brandy.

"Now," said Dr. Cairn, "shall I go ahead?"

"As you like," replied Sime quietly, and again quite master of himself. "Look out for snakes! I will carry the light, and you can keep yours handy in case you may need it."

### III

DR. CAIRN drew himself up into the entrance. The passage was less than four feet high, and generations of sand storms had polished its sloping granite floor so as to render it impossible to descend except by resting one's hands on the roof above and gradually lowering one's self, foot by foot.

A passage of this description, descending at a sharp angle for more than two hundred feet, is not particularly easy to negotiate, and progress was slow. At every five yards or so Dr. Cairn would stop, and, turning on his pocket lamp, would examine the sandy floor and the crevices between the huge blocks that lined the passage, in quest of those faint tracks which warn the traveler that a serpent has recently passed that way. Then, replacing his lamp, he would proceed.

Sime followed in like manner, employing only one hand to support himself, while with the other he constantly directed the

ray of his pocket torch past his companion, and down into the gulf of utter blackness beneath.

Out in the desert the atmosphere had been sufficiently hot, but now with every step it grew hotter and hotter. That indescribable smell, as of a decay begun in remote ages, that rises with the impalpable dust in these mysterious labyrinths of ancient Egypt which never know the light of day, rose stiflingly. At some forty or fifty feet below the level of the sand outside, respiration became difficult, and the two paused, bathed in perspiration and gasping for air.

"Another thirty or forty feet," panted Sime, "and we shall be in the level passage. There is a sort of artificial cavern there, you may remember, where, although we cannot stand upright, we can sit and rest for a few moments."

Speech was exhausting, and no further words were exchanged until the bottom of the slope was reached. Here the combined lights of the two pocket lamps showed them that they had reached a tiny chamber irregularly hewn in the living rock. It was less than four feet high, but, its jagged floor being level, they were enabled to sit for a while.

"Do you notice something unfamiliar in the smell of the place?" Dr. Cairn asked his companion.

Sime nodded, wiping the perspiration from his face the while.

"It was bad enough when I came here before," he replied hoarsely. "It is terrible work for a heavy man; but to-night the place seems to be reeking. I have smelled nothing like it in my life!"

"Correct!" returned Dr. Cairn grimly. "I trust that, once clear of this place, you will never smell it again."

"What is it?"

"It is the incense," was the reply. "Come! The worst of our task is before us yet."

The continuation of the passage now showed as an opening no more than fifteen to seventeen inches high. It was necessary, therefore, to lie prone upon the rubbish of the floor, and to proceed serpent fashion. An explorer could not even employ his knees, so low was the roof, but was compelled to progress by clutching at the irregularities in the wall, and by digging his elbows into the splintered stones he crawled upon.



For three yards or so they proceeded in this way. Then Dr. Cairn suddenly lay still.

"What is it?" whispered Sime.

A threat of panic was in his voice. He dared not conjecture what would happen if either should be overcome in that evil-smelling burrow, deep in the bowels of the ancient building. At that moment it seemed to him, absurdly enough, that the weight of the giant pile rested upon his back, was crushing him, pressing the life out from his body as he lay there prone, with his eyes fixed upon the rubber soles of Dr. Cairn's shoes, directly in front of him.

But softly came a reply:

"Do not speak again. Proceed as quietly as possible, and pray Heaven we are not expected!"

Sime understood. With a malignant enemy before them, this hole in the rock through which they crawled was a certain death trap. He thought of the headless bats, and reflected that he, in crawling out into the shaft ahead, must lay himself open to a similar fate.

Dr. Cairn moved slowly onward. Despite their anxiety to avoid noise, neither he nor his companion could control their heavy breathing. Both were panting for air.

The temperature was now deathly. A candle would scarcely have burned in the vitiated air; and above that odor of ancient rotteness which all explorers of the monuments of Egypt know, rose that other indescribable exhalation which seemed to stifle one's very soul.

Dr. Cairn stopped again.

Sime, having performed this journey before, knew that his companion must have reached the end of the passage, that he must be lying, peering out into the shaft, for which they were making. He extinguished his lamp.

Again Dr. Cairn moved forward. Stretching out his hand, Sime found only emptiness. He wriggled forward, in turn, as rapidly as possible, all the time groping with his fingers.

"Take my hand," came a whisper. "Another two feet forward, and you can stand upright."

He proceeded, grasped the hand which was extended to him in the impenetrable darkness, and, panting, temporarily exhausted, rose upright beside Dr. Cairn, and

found that there was space enough to stretch his cramped limbs.

Side by side they stood, mantled about in such a darkness as cannot be described; in such a silence as dwellers in the busy world cannot conceive; in such an atmosphere of horror that only a man morally and physically brave could have retained his composure.

Dr. Cairn bent to Sime's ear.

"We must have the light for the ascent," he whispered.

"Have your pistol ready, then," returned Sime. "I am about to press the button of the lamp."

A shaft of white light shone suddenly up the rocky sides of the pit in which they stood, and lost itself in the gloom of the chamber above.

"On to my shoulders," said Sime. "You are lighter than I. Then, as soon as you can reach, place your lamp on the floor above, and mount up beside it. I will follow you."

Dr. Cairn, taking advantage of the rugged walls, and of the blocks of stone amid which they stood, mounted upon Sime's shoulders.

"Could you carry your revolver in your teeth?" asked the latter. "I think you might hold it by the trigger guard."

"I proposed to do so," replied Dr. Cairn grimly. "Stand fast!"

Gradually he rose upright upon the other's shoulders. Then, placing his foot in a cranny of the rock, and with his left hand grasping a protruding fragment above, he mounted yet higher, all the time holding the lighted lamp in his right hand. Upward he extended his arms, and upward, until he could place the lamp upon the ledge above his head, where its white beam shone across the top of the shaft.

"Mind it does not fall!" panted Sime, craning his head upward to watch these operations.

Dr. Cairn, whose strength and agility were wonderful, twisted around sidewise, and succeeded in placing his foot on a ledge of stone on the opposite side of the shaft. Resting his weight upon this, he extended his hand to the lip of the opening, and drew himself up to the top, where he crouched in the light of the lamp.

Then, wedging his foot into a crevice a little below him, he reached out his hand to Sime. The latter, following much the same course as his companion, seized the

extended hand, and soon found himself beside Dr. Cairn.

Impetuously he snatched out his own lamp and flashed its beams about the weird apartment in which they found themselves—the so-called King's Chamber of the pyramid. Right and left leaped the searching rays, touching the ends of the wooden beams, which, practically fossilized by long contact with the rock, still survive in that sepulchral place. Above and below and all around he directed the light of his lamp—upon the litter covering the rock floor, upon the blocks of the higher walls, upon the frowning roof.

They were alone in the King's Chamber!

#### IV

"THERE is no one here!"

Sime looked about the place excitedly as he spoke.

"Fortunately for us!" answered Dr. Cairn.

He still breathed rather heavily from his exertions, and, moreover, the air of the chamber was disgusting; but otherwise he was perfectly calm, although his face was pale and bathed in perspiration.

"Make as little noise as possible," the physician whispered.

Now that the place proved to be empty, Sime began to cast off the dread that had possessed him in the passageway; but he found something ominous in his companion's words.

Dr. Cairn, stepping carefully over the rubbish of the floor, advanced to the east corner of the chamber, waving to Sime to follow. Side by side they stood there.

"Do you notice that the abominable smell of the incense is more overpowering here than anywhere?"

Sime nodded.

"You are right. What does that mean?"

Dr. Cairn directed the ray of light down behind a little mound of rubbish into a corner of the wall.

"It means," he said, with a subdued expression of excitement, "that we have got to crawl in there!"

Sime stifled an exclamation.

One of the blocks of the bottom tier was missing at this point—a fact which Dr. Cairn had not detected before by reason of the presence of the mound of rubbish before the opening.

"Silence again, Sime!" whispered the physician.

He lay down flat, and, without hesitation, crept into the gap. As his feet disappeared, Sime followed.

Here it was possible to crawl upon hands and knees. The passage was formed of square stone blocks. It was but three yards or so in length; then it suddenly turned upward at a tremendous angle of about one in four. Square footholds were cut in the lower face.

The smell of incense was almost unbearable now.

Dr. Cairn bent to Sime's ear.

"Not a word, now!" he said. "No light—pistol ready!"

He began to mount. Sime, following, counted the steps. When they had mounted sixty, he knew that they must have come close to the top of the original mastabah, and close to the first stage of the pyramid. Despite the deep shaft beneath, there was little danger of falling, for one could lean back against the wall while seeking for the foothold above.

Dr. Cairn mounted very slowly, fearful of striking his head upon some obstacle. On the seventieth step he found that he could thrust his foot forward, and that no obstruction met his knee. They had reached a horizontal passage.

Very softly the doctor whispered back to Sime:

"Take my hand! I have reached the top."

They entered the passage. The heavy, sickly sweet odor almost overpowered them, but, grimly set upon their purpose, they crept on, after a single moment of hesitancy.

A fitful light rose and fell ahead of them. It gleamed upon the polished walls of the corridor in which they now found themselves—that inexplicable light burning in a place which had known no light since the dim ages of the early Pharaohs!

The events of that incredible night had afforded no such emotion as this. This ghastly light was the crowning wonder, and, in its dreadful mystery, the crowning terror of Meydum.

When first the lambent light played upon the walls of the passage, both men stopped, stricken motionless with fear and amazement. Sime, who would have been prepared to swear that the Meydum Pyramid contained no apartment other than the King's Chamber, was now past mere wonder, past conjecture; but he could still fear.

Dr. Cairn, although he had anticipated this phenomenon, temporarily fell a victim to its supernatural character.

They advanced. They looked into a square chamber of about the same size as the King's Chamber. In fact, although they did not realize it until later, this second apartment, no doubt, was situated directly above the first.

The only light was that of a fire burning in a tripod, and by means of this illumination, which rose and fell in a strange manner, it was possible to perceive at least some of the details of the place. At the moment, however, the doctor and his companion were not concerned with these. They had eyes only for the black-robed figure beside the tripod.

It was that of a man, who stood with his back toward them, chanting monotonously in a tongue unfamiliar to Sime. At certain points in his chant he would raise his arms in such a way that, clad in the black robe, he assumed the appearance of a gigantic bat. Each time that he acted thus, the fire in the tripod, as if fanned into new life, would leap up, casting a hellish glare about the place. Then, as the chanter dropped his arms again, the flame would drop also.

A cloud of reddish vapor floated low in the apartment. There were a number of curiously shaped vessels upon the floor. Against the farther wall, rendered visible only when the flames leaped high, was some motionless white object, apparently hung from the roof.

Dr. Cairn drew a hissing breath and grasped Sime's wrist.

"We are too late!" he said strangely.

He spoke at a moment when his companion, peering through the ruddy gloom of the place, had been endeavoring to perceive more clearly that ominous shape which hung, horrible, in the shadow. He spoke, too, at a moment when the man in the black robe raised his arms—when, as if obedient to his will, the flames leaped up fitfully.

Although Sime could not be sure of what he saw, there came to him a recollection of words recently spoken by Dr. Cairn. He remembered the story of Julian the Apostate, the emperor who was also a necromancer. He remembered what had been found in the Temple of the Moon after Julian's death. He remembered that Lady Lashmore—

And thereupon he experienced such a nausea that, but for the fact that Dr. Cairn gripped him, he must have fallen.

Tutored in a materialistic school, Sime could not even now admit that such monstrous things could be. With a necromantic operation taking place before his eyes; with the unholy perfume of the secret incense all but suffocating him; with the dreadful oracle dully gleaming in the shadows of that temple of evil—his reason would not accept the evidences. Any man of the ancient world—of the Middle Ages—would have known that he was looking upon a professed wizard, upon an adept magician, who, according to one of the most ancient formulas known to mankind, was seeking to question the dead respecting the living.

But how many modern men are there capable of realizing such a thing? How many who would accept the statement that such operations are still performed, not only in the East, but in Europe? How many who, witnessing this mass of Satan, would accept it for verity, would not deny the evidence of their very senses?

He could not believe such an orgy of wickedness possible. A pagan emperor might have been capable of these things, but to-day—wondrous is our faith in the virtue of "to-day"!

"Am I mad," he whispered hoarsely, "or—"

A thinly veiled shape seemed to float out from that still form in the shadows. It assumed definite outlines. It became a woman, beautiful with a beauty that could only be described as awful.

She wore upon her brow the uræus of ancient Egyptian royalty. Her sole garment was a robe of finest gauze. Like a cloud, like a vision, she floated into the light cast by the tripod.

A voice—a voice which seemed to come from a vast distance, from somewhere outside the mighty granite walls of that unholy place—spoke. The language was unknown to Sime, but the fierce hand grip upon his wrist grew fiercer. That dead tongue, that language unspoken since the dawn of Christianity, was known to the man who had been the companion of Sir Michael Ferrara.

In upon Sime swept a swift conviction—that one could not witness such a scene as this and live and move again among one's fellow men. In a sort of frenzy, then, he

wrenched himself free from the physician's detaining hand, and launched a retort of modern science against the challenge of ancient sorcery.

Raising his Browning pistol, he fired shot after shot—at that batlike shape who stood between himself and the tripod.

A thousand frightful echoes filled the chamber with a demon mockery, booming along those subterranean passages beneath, and bearing the conflict of sound into the hidden places of the pyramid which had probably known no sound for untold generations.

"My God!"

Vaguely he became aware that Dr. Cairn was seeking to drag him away. Through a cloud of smoke he saw the black-robed figure turn. Dream fashion, he saw the pallid, glistening face of Antony Ferrara. The long evil eyes, alight like the eyes of a serpent, were fixed upon him. He seemed to stand amid a chaos, in a mad world beyond the borders of reason, beyond the dominions of God; but to his stupefied mind one astounding fact found access.

He had fired at least seven shots at the black-robed figure, and it was not humanly possible that all could have gone wide of their mark; yet Antony Ferrara still lived!

Utter darkness blotted out the evil vision. Then there was a white light ahead; and, feeling that he was struggling for sanity, Sime managed to realize that Dr. Cairn, retreating along the passage, was crying to him, in a voice rising almost to a shriek, to run—run for his life—for his salvation!

"You should not have fired!" he seemed to hear.

Unconscious of any contact with the stones—although afterward he found his knees and shins to be torn and bleeding—he was scrambling down that long, sloping shaft.

He had a vague impression that Dr. Cairn, descending beneath him, sometimes grasped his ankles and placed his feet into the footholes. A continuous roaring sound filled his ears, as if a great ocean were casting its storm waves against the structure around him. The place seemed to rock.

"Down flat!"

Some sense of reality was returning to him. Now he perceived that Dr. Cairn was urging him to crawl back along the short passage by which they had entered from the King's Chamber.

Heedless of hurt, he threw himself down and pressed on.

There came a blank, like the sleep of exhaustion which follows delirium. Then Sime found himself standing in the King's Chamber, with Dr. Cairn, who held an electric lamp in his hand, beside him, and half supporting him.

The realities were suddenly reasserting themselves.

"I have dropped my pistol!" muttered Sime.

He threw off the supporting arm, and turned to the corner behind the heap of debris, where was the opening through which they had entered the satanic temple.

No opening was visible!

"He has closed it!" cried Dr. Cairn. "There are six stone doors between here and the place above. If he had succeeded in shutting one of them before we—"

"My God!" whispered Sime. "Let us get out! I am nearly at the end of my tether!"

Fear lends wings, and it was with something like the lightness of a bird that Sime descended the shaft.

"On to my shoulders!" he cried, when he reached the bottom.

Dr. Cairn lowered himself to the foot of the shaft.

"You go first," he said.

He was gasping, as if nearly suffocated, but he retained a wonderful self-control. Once over into the borderland, and bravery assumes a new guise. The courage which can face physical danger undaunted, melts in the fires of the unknown.

Sime, his breath whistling sibilantly between his clenched teeth, hauled himself through the low passage with incredible speed. The two worked their way arduously up the long slope. They saw the blue sky above them.

## V

"SOMETHING like a huge bat," said Robert Cairn, "crawled out upon the first stage. We both fired—"

Dr. Cairn raised his hand. He lay exhausted at the foot of the mound.

"He had lighted the incense," he replied, "and was reciting the secret ritual. I cannot explain; but your shots were wasted. We came too late—"

"Lady Lashmore—"

"Until the Pyramid of Meydum is pulled down, stone by stone, the world will



never know the true story of her fate. Sime and I have looked in at the gate of hell. Only the hand of God plucked us back. Look!"

The physician pointed to the companion of his nocturnal adventure. Sime lay, palid with closed eyes—and his hair was sandantly streaked with white.

## FOURTH MYSTERY—FLOWERING OF THE LOTUS

TO Robert Cairn it seemed that the boat train would never reach Charing Cross. His restlessness was appalling. He perpetually glanced from his father, with whom he shared the compartment, to the flying Kentish landscape with its vistas of hop poles. Dr. Cairn, although he exhibited less anxiety, was, nevertheless, strung to highest tension.

That dash from Cairo homeward had been something of a fevered dream to both men. To learn, while one is searching for a malign and implacable enemy in Egypt, that that enemy, having secretly returned to London, is weaving his evil spells around "some we loved, the loveliest and the best," is to know the meaning of an ordeal.

In pursuit of Antony Ferrara—the incarnation of an awful evil—Dr. Cairn had deserted his practice and had left England for Egypt. Now he was hurrying back again; for while he had sought in strange and dark places of that land of mystery for Antony Ferrara, the latter had been darkly active in London!

Again and again Robert Cairn read the letter which, surely as a royal command, had recalled them. It was from Myra Duquesne. One line in it had fallen upon them like a bomb, had altered all their plans, had shattered the one fragment of peace remaining to them.

In the eyes of Robert Cairn, the whole universe centered around Myra Duquesne. She was the one being in the world of whom he could not bear to think in conjunction with Antony Ferrara. Now he knew that Antony Ferrara was beside her, was, doubtless at this very moment, directing those black arts of which he was master, to the destruction of her mind and body—perhaps of her very soul.

Again he drew the worn envelope from his pocket and read that ominous sentence, which, when his eyes had first fallen upon it, had blotted out the sunlight of Egypt:

You will be surprised to hear that Antony is back in London, and is a frequent visitor here. It is quite like old times.

"Keep calm, my boy," urged the doctor. "It can profit us nothing, it can profit Myra nothing, for you to shatter your nerves at a time when real trials are before you. You are inviting another breakdown. Oh, I know it is hard; but for everybody's sake try to keep yourself in hand."

"I am trying my best, sir," replied Robert hollowly.

Dr. Cairn nodded.

"We must be diplomatic," he continued. "That James Saunderson proposed to return to London, I had no idea. I thought that Myra would be far outside the black maelstrom in Scotland. Had I suspected that Saunderson would come to London, I should have made other arrangements."

"Of course, sir, I know that; but even so we could never have foreseen this."

Dr. Cairn shook his head.

"To think that while we have been scouring Egypt from Port Said to Assuan, he has been laughing at us in London!" he said. "Directly after the affair at Meydum he must have left the country—how, Heaven only knows. That letter is three weeks old, isn't it?"

Robert Cairn nodded.

"What may have happened since—what may have happened!"

"You take too gloomy a view. James Saunderson is a Roman guardian. Even Antony Ferrara could make little headway there."

"But Myra says that—Ferrara is—a frequent visitor."

"And Saunderson," replied Dr. Cairn, with a grim smile, "is a Scotsman! Rely upon his diplomacy, Rob. Myra will be safe enough."

"God grant that she is!"

At that, silence fell between them, until, punctually to time, the train slowed into

Charing Cross. Inspired by a common anxiety, Dr. Cairn and his son were first among the passengers to pass the barrier. The car was waiting for them; and within five minutes of the arrival of the train they were whirling through London's traffic to the house of James Saunderson.

It stood on Dulwich Common—a quaint backwater remote from motor bus highways. It was a rambling, red-tiled building which at one time had been a farmhouse. As the big car pulled up at the gate, Saunderson, a large-boned Scotsman, tawny-eyed, and with his gray hair worn long and untidily, came out to meet them. Myra Duquesne stood beside him. A quick blush colored her face momentarily, then left it pale again.

Indeed, her pallor was alarming. As Robert Cairn, leaping from the car, seized both her hands and looked into her eyes, it seemed to him that the girl had almost an ethereal appearance.

Something clutched at his heart and iced his blood; for Myra Duquesne seemed a creature scarcely belonging to the world of humanity—seemed already half a spirit. The light in her sweet eyes was good to see; but her fragility, and a certain transparency of complexion, horrified him.

Yet he knew that he must hide these fears from her. Turning to Mr. Saunderson, he shook him warmly by the hand, and the party of four passed by the low porch into the house.

In the hallway Miss Saunderson, a typical Scottish housekeeper, stood beaming welcome; but suddenly, in the very instant of greeting her, Robert Cairn stopped as if transfixed. Dr. Cairn also pulled up just within the door, his nostrils quivering and his clear gray eyes turning right and left, searching the shadows.

Miss Saunderson could not help noticing this sudden restraint.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked anxiously.

Myra, standing beside Mr. Saunderson, began to look frightened; but Dr. Cairn, shaking off the incubus which had descended upon him, forced a laugh, and, clapping a hand upon Robert's shoulder, cried:

"Wake up, my boy! I know it is good to be back in England again, but keep your daydreaming for after lunch!"

Robert Cairn forced a ghostly smile in return, and the odd incident promised soon to be forgotten.

"How good of you," said Myra, as the party entered the dining room, "to come right from the station to see us! And you must be expected in Half Moon Street, Dr. Cairn?"

"Of course we came to see you first," replied Robert Cairn significantly.

Myra lowered her face and pursued that subject no further.

No mention was made of Antony Ferrara, and neither Dr. Cairn nor Robert cared to broach the subject. The lunch passed off without any reference to the very matter which had brought them there that day.

It was not until nearly an hour later that Dr. Cairn and his son found themselves alone for a moment. Then, with a furtive glance about him, the doctor spoke of that which had occupied his mind, to the exclusion of all else, since first they had entered the house of James Saunderson.

"You noticed it, Rob?" he whispered.

"My God! It nearly choked me!"

Dr. Cairn nodded grimly.

"It is all over the house," he continued, "in every room that I have entered. They are used to it, and evidently do not notice it, but coming in from the clean air, it is—" "Abominable, unclean—unholy!"

"We know that smell of unholiness," continued Dr. Cairn softly. "We have good reason to know it. It heralded the death of Sir Michael Ferrara. It heralded the death of another."

"With a just God in heaven, can such things be?"

"It is the secret incense of ancient Egypt," whispered Dr. Cairn, glancing toward the open door. "It is the odor of that black magic which, by all natural law, should be buried and lost forever in the tombs of the ancient wizards. Only two living men within my knowledge know the use and the hidden meaning of that perfume. Only one living man has ever dared to make it and use it."

"Antony Ferrara!"

"We knew he was here, boy; now we know that he is using his powers here. Something tells me that we come to the end of the fight. May victory be with the just!"

## II

HALF MOON STREET was bathed in tropical sunlight. Dr. Cairn, with his hands behind him, stood looking out of the window. He turned to his son, who leaned

against a corner of the bookcase in the shadow of the big room.

"Hot enough for Egypt, Rob," he said.

Robert Cairn nodded.

"Antony Ferrara," he replied, "seemingly travels his own atmosphere with him. I first became acquainted with his hellish activities during a phenomenal thunderstorm. In Egypt his movements apparently corresponded with those of the khamsin. Now"—he waved his hand vaguely toward the window—"this is Egypt in London."

"Egypt is in London, indeed," muttered Dr. Cairn. "Jermyn has decided that our fears are well founded."

"You mean, sir, that the will—"

"Antony Ferrara would have an almost unassailable case in the event of—of Myra—"

"You mean that her share of the legacy would fall to that fiend, if she—"

"If she died? Exactly."

Robert Cairn began to stride up and down the room, clenching and unclenching his fists. He was a shadow of his former self, but now his cheeks were flushed and his eyes feverishly bright.

"Before Heaven," he cried suddenly, "the situation is becoming unbearable! A thing more deadly than the plague is abroad here in London. Apart from the personal aspect of the matter—of which I dare not think—what do we know of Ferrara's activities? His record is damnable. To our certain knowledge, his victims are many. If the murder of his adoptive father, Sir Michael, was actually the first of his crimes, we know of three other poor souls who beyond any shadow of doubt were launched into eternity by the black arts of this ghastly villain."

"We do indeed, Rob," replied Dr. Cairn sternly.

"He has made attempts upon you; he has made attempts upon me. We owe our survival"—he pointed to a row of books upon a corner shelf—"to the knowledge which you have accumulated in half a lifetime of research. In the face of science, in the face of modern skepticism, in the face of our belief in a benign God, this creature, Antony Ferrara, has proved himself conclusively to be—"

"He is what the benighted ancients called a magician," interrupted Dr. Cairn quietly. "He is what was known in the Middle Ages as a wizard. What that means, exactly, few modern thinkers know;

but I know, and one day others will know. Meanwhile his shadow lies upon a certain house."

Robert Cairn shook his clenched fists in the air. In some men the gesture would have seemed melodramatic; in him it was the expression of a soul's agony.

"But, sir," he cried, "are we to wait, inert, helpless? Whatever he is, he has a human body, and there are bullets, there are knives, there a hundred drugs in the pharmacopœia!"

"Quite so," answered Dr. Cairn, watching his son closely, and, by his own collected manner, endeavoring to check the other's growing excitement. "I am prepared at any personal risk to crush Antony Ferrara as I would crush a venomous scorpion; but where is he?"

Robert Cairn groaned, dropping into the big leathern armchair, and burying his face in his hands.

"Our position is maddening," continued the elder man. "We know that Ferrara visits Mr. Saunderson's house; we know that he is laughing at our vain attempts to trap him. Crowning comedy of all, Saunderson does not know the truth, and is not the type of man who could ever understand. In fact, we dare not tell him, and we dare not tell Myra. The result is that those whom we would protect are unwittingly working against us, and against themselves."

"That perfume!" burst out Robert Cairn. "That hell's incense which loads the atmosphere of Saunderson's house! To think that we know what it means!"

"Perhaps I know even better than you do, Rob. The hidden secrets of perfume are not understood nowadays; but you, from your experience, know that certain perfumes have occult uses. At the Pyramid of Meydum, in Egypt, Antony Ferrara dared—and the just God did not strike him dead—to make a certain incense. It was often made in the remote past, and a portion of it, probably in a jar hermetically sealed, had come into his possession. I once detected its dreadful odor in his rooms in London. Had you asked me, before that, if any of the hellish stuff had survived to the present day, I should emphatically have said no; but I should have been wrong. Ferrara had some. He used it all, and went to the Meydum pyramid to renew his stock."

Robert Cairn was listening intently.

"All this brings me back to a point which I have touched upon before, sir," he said. "To my certain knowledge, the late Sir Michael and yourself have delved into the black mysteries of Egypt more deeply than any men of the present century; yet Antony Ferrara, little more than a boy, has mastered secrets which you, after years of research, have failed to grasp. What does this mean, sir?"

Dr. Cairn, again locking his hands behind him, stared out of the window.

"He is not an ordinary mortal," continued his son. "He is supernormal, and supernaturally wicked. You have admitted—indeed, it was evident—that he is merely the adopted son of the late Sir Michael. Now that we have entered upon the final struggle—for I feel that this is so—I will ask you once again, who is Antony Ferrara?"

Dr. Cairn spun around upon the speaker. His gray eyes were very bright.

"There is one little obstacle," he answered, "which has kept me from telling you what you have asked so often. Although you will find it hard to believe—and you have had dreadful opportunities to peer behind the veil—I hope very shortly to be able to answer that question, and to tell you who Antony Ferrara really is."

Robert Cairn beat his fist upon the arm of the chair.

"I sometimes wonder," he said, "that either of us has remained sane. Oh, what does it mean? What can we do? What can we do?"

"We must watch, Rob. To enlist the services of Saunderson would be almost impossible. He lives in his orchid houses; they are his world. In matters of ordinary life I can trust him above most men, but in this—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Could we suggest to him a reason—any reason but the real one—why he should refuse to receive Ferrara?"

"It might destroy our last chance."

"But, sir," cried Robert wildly, "it amounts to this—we are using poor Myra as a lure!"

"In order to save her, Rob—simply in order to save her," retorted Dr. Cairn.

"How ill she looks!" groaned the other. "How pale and worn! There are great shadows under her eyes. I cannot bear to think about her!"

"When was he last there?"

"Apparently some ten days ago. You may depend upon him to be aware of our return! He will not come there again, sir; but there are other ways in which he might reach her. Does he not command a whole shadow army? Mr. Saunderson is entirely unsuspecting. Myra thinks of the fiend as a brother; and yet she has never once spoken of him. I wonder—"

Dr. Cairn sat deep in reflection. Suddenly he took out his watch.

"Go there now," he said. "You will be in time for lunch. Remain there until I come. From to-day onward, although you should not have to bear such a strain, we must watch—watch night and day!"

### III

MYRA DUQUESNE came under an arch of roses to the wooden seat where Robert Cairn awaited her. In her plain white linen frock, with the sun in her hair and her eyes looking unnaturally large, owing to the pallor of her beautiful face, she seemed to the man who rose to greet her an ethereal creature, but lightly linked to the flesh and blood world.

An impulse which had possessed him often enough before, but which hitherto he had suppressed, suddenly possessed him anew. It set his heart beating and filled his veins with fire. As a soft blush spread over the girl's pale cheeks, and, with a sort of timidity, she held out her hand, he leaped to his feet, threw his arms around her, and kissed her—kissed her eyes, her hair, her lips.

There was a moment of frightened hesitancy. Then she resigned herself to this savage tenderness, which was more delicious in its very brutality than any caress she had ever known. It thrilled her with a glorious joy such as, she realized now, she had dreamed of, and lacked, and desired. It was a harborage to which she came, blushing, confused—but glad, conquered, and happy in the thrall of that exquisite slavery.

"Myra!" Robert whispered. "Dear Myra! Have I frightened you? Will you forgive me?"

She nodded her head quickly, and nestled upon his shoulder.

"I could wait no longer," he murmured in her ear. "Words seemed unnecessary. I just wanted you. You are everything in the world, and," he concluded simply, "I took you!"



She whispered his name very softly. What a serenity there is in such a moment, what a glow of secure happiness, of immunity from the pains and sorrows of the world!

Robert Cairn, his arms about this girl, who, from his early boyhood, had been his ideal of womanhood, of love, and of all that love meant, forgot the terrible things which had shaken his life and brought him to the threshold of death. He forgot the evidence of illness which marred the once glorious beauty of the girl, forgot the black menace of the future, forgot the wizard enemy whose hand was stretched over that house and that garden—and was merely happy.

But this paroxysm of gladness—which Eliphas Levi, last of the adepts, has so marvelously analyzed in one of his works—is of short duration, as are all joys. It is needless to recount here the disjointed sentences, punctuated with those first kisses which sweeten the memory of old age, that now passed for conversation—broken words which lovers have believed to be conversation since the world began. As dusk creeps over a glorious landscape, so the shadow of Antony Ferrara crept over the happiness of these two.

Gradually that shadow fell between them and the sun. The grim thing which loomed big in the lives of them both, refused any longer to be ignored. Robert Cairn, his arm about the girl's waist, broached the hated subject.

"When did you last see—Ferrara?"

Myra looked up suddenly.

"Over a week—nearly a fortnight ago."

"Ah!"

Cairn noted that the girl spoke of Ferrara with an odd sort of restraint, for which he was at a loss to account. Myra had always regarded her guardian's adopted son in the light of a brother. Her present attitude, therefore, was all the more singular.

"You did not expect him to return to England so soon?" he asked.

"I had no idea that he was in England," said Myra, "until he walked in here one day. I was glad to see him—then."

"And would you not be glad to see him now?" inquired Cairn eagerly.

Myra, her head lowered, deliberately pressed out a crease in her white skirt.

"One day, last week," she replied slowly, "he—came here and—acted strangely."

"In what way?" jerked Cairn.

"He pointed out to me that actually we—he and I—were in no way related."

"Well?"

"You know how I have always liked Antony. I have always thought of him as my brother."

Again she hesitated, and a troubled expression crept over her pale face. Cairn raised his arm and clasped it about her shoulders.

"Tell me all about it," he whispered reassuringly.

"Well," continued Myra, in evident confusion, "his behavior became—embarrassing. Suddenly he asked me if I could love him, not as a brother, but—"

"I understand!" said Cairn grimly.

"And you replied?"

"For some time I could not reply at all. I was so much surprised, and so much—horrified. I cannot explain just how I felt about it, but it seemed horrible—it seemed horrible!"

"Of course you told him so?"

"I told him that I could never be fond of him in any different way—that I could never think of it. Although I endeavored to avoid hurting his feelings, he—took it badly. He said, in such a queer, choking voice, that he was going away—"

"Away from England?"

"Yes; and he made a strange request."

"What was it?"

"In the circumstances—you see, I felt sorry for him—I did not like to refuse him. It was only a trifling thing. He asked for a lock of my hair."

"A lock of your hair! And you—"

"I told you that I did not like to refuse. I let him snip off a tiny piece, with a pair of pocket scissors which he had. Are you angry?"

"Of course not! You were almost brought up together. You—"

"Then"—she paused—"he seemed to change. Suddenly I found myself afraid—dreadfully afraid!"

"Of Ferrara?"

"Not of Antony, exactly; but how can I explain? A most awful dread seized me. His face was no longer the face that I have always known. Something—" Her voice trembled, and she seemed disposed to leave the sentence unfinished. "Something evil—sinister—had come into it," she concluded with some difficulty.

"And since then," said Cairn, "you have not seen him?"

"He has not been here since then—no."

Cairn, his hands resting upon the girl's shoulders, leaned back in the seat, and looked into her troubled eyes with a sad scrutiny.

"You have not been fretting about him?"

Myra shook her head.

"Yet you look as if something was troubling you. This house"—he indicated the low-lying garden with a certain irritation—"is not healthily situated. It lies in a valley. Look at the rank grass—and there are mosquitoes everywhere. You do not look well, Myra."

The girl smiled a little wistful smile.

"But I was so tired of Scotland!" she said. "You do not know how I looked forward to London again. I must admit, though, that I was in better health there. I was quite ashamed of my dairymaid appearance."

"You have nothing to amuse you here," said Cairn tenderly. "You have no company, for Mr. Saunderson only lives for his orchids."

"They are very fascinating," said Myra dreamily. "I, too, have felt their glamour. I am the only member of the household whom he allows among his orchids."

"Perhaps you spend too much time there," interrupted Cairn. "That superheated, artificial atmosphere—"

Myra shook her head playfully.

"There is nothing in the world the matter with me, now that you are back!" she said, almost in her old bright manner.

"I do not approve of orchids," Cairn went on doggedly. "They are parodies of what a flower should be. Place an odontoglossum beside a rose, and what a distorted, unholy thing it looks!"

"Unholy?" laughed Myra.

"Unholy—yes! They are products of feverish swamps and deathly jungles. I hate orchids. The atmosphere of an orchid house cannot possibly be clear and healthy. One might as well spend one's time in a bacteriological laboratory."

Myra shook her head with a pretended air of seriousness.

"You must not let Mr. Saunderson hear you," she said. "His orchids are his children. Their very mystery enthralls him. Really, Robert, they are most fascinating. To look at one of those shapeless bulbs, and to speculate upon what kind of bloom it will produce, is almost as thrilling as

reading a sensational novel. He has one growing now—it will probably bloom some time this week—about which he is frantically excited."

"Where did he get it?" asked Cairn, without interest.

"He bought it from a man who had almost certainly stolen it. There were six bulbs in the parcel; only two have lived, and one of these is much more advanced than the other. It is so high."

She held out her hand, indicating a height of some three feet from the ground.

"It has not flowered yet?"

"No, but the buds—huge, smooth, egg-shaped things—seem on the point of bursting at any moment. We call it the Mystery, and it is my special care. Mr. Saunderson has shown me how to attend to its simple needs. If it proves to be a new species—which is almost certain—he is going to exhibit it, and name it after me. Would you be proud of having an orchid named after—"

"After my wife?" Cairn concluded, seizing her hands. "I could never be more proud of you than I am already!"

#### IV

DR. CAIRN walked to the window, with its old-fashioned leaded panes. A lamp stood by the bedside, and he had tilted the shade so that it shone upon the pale face of the patient—Myra Duquesne.

Two days had wrought a dreadful change in her. She lay with closed eyes, and with ominous shadows playing upon her sunken face. Her respiration was imperceptible.

The reputation of Dr. Bruce Cairn was a well deserved one, but this case puzzled him. He knew that Myra Duquesne was dying before his eyes. He could still see the agonized face of his son, who at that moment was waiting, filled with intolerable suspense, downstairs in Mr. Saunderson's study; but, withal, he was helpless.

He looked out from the rose-entwined casement, across the shrubbery, to where the moonlight glittered among the trees. Those were the orchid houses. With his back to the bed, Dr. Cairn stood for long, thoughtfully watching the distant gleams of reflected light.

Craig Fenton and Sir Elwin Groves, with whom he had been consulting, had just gone. The nature of Myra Duquesne's illness had utterly puzzled them, and they had left, mystified.

Downstairs, Robert Cairn was pacing the study, wondering if his reason would survive this final blow which threatened. He knew, and his father knew, that a sinister something underlay this strange illness—an illness which had commenced on the day when Antony Ferrara had last visited the house.

The evening was insufferably hot. Not a breeze stirred in the leaves; and, despite open windows, the air of the room was heavy and lifeless. A faint perfume, having a sort of sweetness, but yet unutterably revolting, made itself perceptible to the nostrils. Apparently it had pervaded the house by slow degrees. The occupants were so used to it that they did not notice it at all.

Dr. Cairn had busied himself that evening in the sick room, burning some pungent preparation, to the amazement of the nurse and of the consultants. Now the biting fumes of his pastilles had all been wafted out of the window, and the faint, sweet smell was as noticeable as ever.

Not a sound broke the silence of the house. When the nurse quietly opened the door and entered, Dr. Cairn was still standing at the window, staring thoughtfully in the direction of the orchid houses. He turned, and, walking back to the bedside, bent over the patient.

Her face was like a white mask, and she was quite unconscious. So far as he could see, she showed no change either for better or worse; but her pulse was slightly more feeble. The doctor suppressed a groan of despair, for this mysterious progressive weakness could only have one end. All his experience told him that unless something could be done—and every expedient thus far attempted had proved futile—Myra Duquesne would die about dawn.

He turned on his heel and strode from the room, whispering a few words of instruction to the nurse. Descending the stairs, he passed the closed study door, not daring to think of his son who waited within, and entered the dining room.

A single lamp burned there, and the gaunt figure of Mr. Saunderson was outlined dimly where he sat in the window seat. Crombie, the gardener, stood by the table.

"Now, Crombie," said Dr. Cairn quietly, closing the door behind him, "what is this story about the orchid houses, and why did you not mention it before?"

The man stared persistently into the shadows of the room, avoiding Dr. Cairn's glance.

"Since he has had the courage to own up," interrupted Mr. Saunderson, "I have overlooked the matter. He was afraid to speak before, because he had no business to be in the orchid houses." His Scotsman's voice grew suddenly fierce. "He knows it well enough!"

"I know, sir, that you don't want me to interfere with the orchids," replied the man; "but I only ventured in because I thought I saw a light moving there."

"Rubbish!" snapped Mr. Saunderson.

"Pardon me, Saunderson," said Dr. Cairn; "but a matter of more importance than the welfare of all the orchids in the world is under consideration now."

Saunderson coughed dryly.

"You are right, Cairn," he said. "I shouldn't have lost my temper for such a trifle, at a time like this. Tell your own tale, Crombie. I won't interrupt."

"It was last night, then," continued the man. "I was standing at the door of my cottage, smoking a pipe before turning in, when I saw a faint light moving over by the orchid houses."

"Reflection of the moon, no doubt," muttered Saunderson. "I am sorry. Go on, Crombie!"

"I knew that some of the orchids were very valuable, and I thought there would not be time to call you. Also I did not want to worry you, knowing you had worry enough already, so I knocked out my pipe, put it in my pocket, and went through the shrubbery. I saw the light again. It seemed to move from the first house into the second. I couldn't see what it was."

"Was it like a candle, or a pocket lamp?" jerked Dr. Cairn.

"Nothing like that, sir; a softer light, more like a glowworm, but much brighter. I went around and tried the door, and it was locked. Then I remembered the door at the other end, and I cut around by the path between the houses and the wall, so that I had no chance to see the light again, until I got to the other door. I found this unlocked. There was a close kind of smell in there, sir, and the air was very hot."

"Naturally, it was hot," interrupted Saunderson.

"I mean much hotter than it should have been. It was like an oven, and the smell was stifling."

"What smell?" asked Dr. Cairn. "Can you describe it?"

"Excuse me, sir, but I seem to notice it here in this room to-night. I think I noticed it about the place before, but never so strong as in the orchid houses."

"Go on!" said Dr. Cairn.

"I went through the first house, and saw nothing. The shadow of the wall prevented the moonlight from shining in there; but just as I was about to enter the middle house, I thought I saw—a face."

"What do you mean by saying that you thought you saw a face?" snapped Mr. Saunderson.

"I mean, sir, that it was so horrible and so strange that I could not believe it was real—which is one of the reasons why I did not speak before. It reminded me of the face of a gentleman I have seen here—Mr. Ferrara."

Dr. Cairn stifled an exclamation.

"But in other ways it was quite unlike the gentleman. In some ways it was more like the face of a woman—a very bad woman. It had a sort of bluish light on it, but where any light could have come from I don't know. It seemed to be smiling, and two bright eyes looked straight out at me."

Crombie stopped, raising his hand to his head confusedly.

"I could see nothing but just this face—low down, as if the person it belonged to was crouching on the floor. There was a tall plant of some kind just beside it."

"Well," said Dr. Cairn, "go on! What did you do?"

"I turned to run," confessed the man. "If you had seen that horrible face, you would understand how frightened I was. Then, when I got to the door, I looked back."

"I hope you had closed the door behind you," snapped Saunderson.

"Never mind that, never mind that!" interrupted Dr. Cairn.

"I had closed the door behind me—yes, sir; but just as I was going to open it again, I took a quick glance back, and the face had gone. I came out, and I was walking over the lawn, wondering whether I should tell you, when it occurred to me that I hadn't noticed whether the key had been left in or not."

"Did you go back to see?" asked Dr. Cairn.

"I didn't want to," admitted Crombie, "but I did, and—"

"Well?"

"The door was locked, sir."

"So you concluded that your imagination had been playing you tricks!" said Saunderson grimly. "In my opinion you were right."

Dr. Cairn dropped into an armchair.

"All right, Crombie; that will do."

Crombie, with a mumbled "Good night, gentlemen," turned and left the room.

"Why are you worrying about such a thing as this," inquired Saunderson, when the door had closed, "at a time like the present?"

"Never mind," replied Dr. Cairn wearily. "I must return to Half Moon Street now, but I shall be back within an hour."

With no other word to Saunderson, he stood up and walked out to the hall. He rapped at the study door, and it was instantly opened by Robert Cairn. No spoken word was necessary; the burning question could be read in the young man's burning eyes. Dr. Cairn laid his hand upon his son's shoulder.

"I won't excite false hopes, Rob," he said huskily. "I am going back to the house, and I want you to come with me."

Robert Cairn turned his head aside, groaning aloud; but his father grasped him by the arm, and together they left that house of shadows, entered the car which waited at the gate, and, without exchanging a word *en route*, came to Half Moon Street.

Dr. Cairn led the way into the library, switching on the reading lamp upon the large table. His son stood just within the doorway, his arms folded and his chin upon his breast. The doctor sat down at the table, watching the other.

Suddenly Robert spoke.

"Is it possible, sir, is it possible"—his voice was barely audible—"that her illness can in any way be due to the orchids?"

Dr. Cairn frowned thoughtfully.

"What do you mean, exactly?" he asked.

"Orchids are mysterious things. They come from places where there are strange and dreadful diseases. Is it not possible that they may convey—"

"Some sort of contagion?" concluded Dr. Cairn. "It is a point that I have seen raised, certainly; but nothing of the sort has ever been established. I have heard something, to-night, though, which—"

"What have you heard, sir?" asked his son eagerly, stepping forward to the table.



"Never mind at the moment, Rob. Let me think."

He rested his elbow upon the table and his chin in his hand. His professional instincts had told him that unless something could be done—something which the highest medical skill in London had thus far been unable to devise—Myra Duquesne had only four or five hours to live.

Somewhere in his mind a memory lurked, evasive, taunting him. This wild suggestion of his son's, that the girl's illness might be due in some way to her contact with the orchids, was in part responsible for his confused recollection; but it seemed to be associated, too, with the story of Crombie, the gardener, and with Antony Ferrara. He felt that somewhere in the darkness surrounding him there was a speck of light, if he could but turn in the right direction to see it.

So, while Robert Cairn walked restlessly about the big room, the doctor sat with his chin resting in the palm of his hand, seeking to concentrate his mind upon that vague memory, which defied him. The hand of the library clock crept from twelve toward one, and he knew that the faint life in Myra Duquesne was slowly ebbing away in response to some mysterious condition, utterly outside his experience.

Distant clocks struck a single stroke—one o'clock!

Robert Cairn began to beat his fist into the palm of his left hand convulsively. His father did not stir, but sat there, a black-shadowed wrinkle between his brows.

"By God!"

The doctor sprang to his feet, and with feverish haste began to fumble among a bunch of keys.

"What is it, sir? What is it?"

The doctor unlocked the drawer of the big table, and drew out a thick manuscript written in small and exquisitely neat characters. He placed it under the lamp, and rapidly began to turn the pages.

"It is hope, Rob!" he said, with quiet self-possession.

Robert Cairn came around the table and leaned over his father's shoulder.

"Sir Michael Ferrara's writing!"

"His unpublished book, Rob. We were to have completed it together, but death claimed him, and, in view of the contents, I—perhaps superstitiously—decided to suppress it. Ah!"

He placed the point of his finger upon a

carefully drawn sketch, designed to illustrate the text. It was evidently a careful copy from an ancient Egyptian original. It represented a row of priestesses, each having her hair plaited in a thick cue, standing before a priest armed with a pair of scissors. In the center of the drawing was an altar, upon which stood vases of flowers; and upon the right ranked a row of mummies, corresponding in number with the priestesses upon the left.

"By God!" repeated Dr. Cairn. "We were both wrong, we were both wrong!"

"What do you mean, sir? For Heaven's sake, what do you mean?"

"This drawing," replied Dr. Cairn, "was copied from the wall of a certain tomb, now reclosed. Since we knew that the tomb was that of one of the greatest wizards who ever lived in Egypt, we also knew that the inscription had some magical significance. We knew that the flowers represented here were a species of the extinct sacred lotus. All our researches did not avail us to discover for what purpose, or by what means, these flowers were cultivated. Nor could we determine the meaning of the cutting off"—he ran his fingers over the sketch—"of the priestesses' hair by the high priest of the goddess."

"What goddess, sir?"

"A goddess, Rob, of whom Egyptology knows nothing. Hers, apparently, was a mystical religion, the existence of which has been vaguely suspected by a living French savant; but this is no time—"

Dr. Cairn closed the manuscript, replaced it, and relocked the drawer. He glanced at the clock.

"A quarter past one," he said. "Come, Rob!"

Without hesitation, his son followed him from the house. The car was waiting, and shortly they were speeding through the deserted streets back to the house where death in a strange guise was beckoning to Myra Duquesne.

"Do you know," asked Dr. Cairn, "if Saunderson has bought any orchids—quite recently, I mean?"

"Yes," replied his son dully. "He bought a small parcel only a fortnight ago."

"A fortnight!" cried Dr. Cairn excitedly. "You are quite sure of that? You mean that the purchase was made since Ferrara—"

"Ceased to visit the house? Yes. Why, it must have been the very day after!"

Dr. Cairn was evidently laboring under tremendous excitement.

"Where did he buy these orchids?" he asked evenly.

"From some one who came to the house—some one with whom he had never dealt before."

The doctor, his hands resting upon his knees, was rapidly drumming with his finger tips.

"And did he cultivate them?"

"Two only proved successful. One is on the point of blooming—if it is not blooming already. He calls it the Mystery."

At that, the doctor's excitement overcame him. Suddenly leaning out of the window, he shouted to the chauffeur:

"Quicker! Quicker! Never mind risks! Keep on top speed!"

"What is it, sir?" cried his son. "Heavens, what is it?"

"Did you say that it might have bloomed, Rob?"

"Myra"—Robert Cairn swallowed noisily—"told me three days ago that it was expected to bloom before the end of the week."

"What is it like?"

"A thing four feet high, with huge egg-shaped buds."

"Merciful God grant that we are in time!" whispered Dr. Cairn. "I could believe once more in the justice of Heaven, if the great knowledge of Sir Michael Ferrara should prove to be the weapon to destroy the fiend whom we raised—he and I—may we be forgiven!"

Robert Cairn's excitement was dreadful.

"Can you tell me nothing?" he cried.

"What do you hope? What do you fear?"

"Don't ask me, Rob," replied his father.

"You will know within five minutes."

The car was leaping along the dark suburban roads at a speed little below that of an express train. Corners the chauffeur negotiated in racing fashion, so that at times two wheels thrashed the empty air. Once or twice the big car swung around as upon a pivot, only to recover again in response to the skilled tactics of the driver.

They roared down the sloping, narrow lane to the gate of Mr. Saunderson's house with a noise like the coming of a great storm, and they were nearly hurled from their seats when the brakes were applied and the car was brought to a standstill.

Dr. Cairn leaped out, pushed open the gate, and ran up to the house, his son

closely following. There was a light in the hall, and Miss Saunderson, who had expected them, and had heard their stormy approach, already held the door open.

"Wait here one moment," said Dr. Cairn, in the hall.

Ignoring Saunderson, who had come out from the library, he ran upstairs. A minute later, his face very pale, he came running down again.

"Is she worse?" began Saunderson. "But—"

"Give me the key of the orchid house!" said Dr. Cairn peremptorily.

"Orchid house!"

"Don't hesitate. Don't waste a second. Give me the key!"

Saunderson's expression showed that he thought Dr. Cairn to be mad, but nevertheless he plunged his hand into his pocket and pulled out a key ring. Dr. Cairn snatched it in a flash.

"Which key?" he snapped.

"The Chubb, but—"

"Follow me, Rob!"

Down the hall raced the physician, his son beside him, and Mr. Saunderson followed more slowly. Out into the garden he went and swiftly over the lawn toward the shrubbery.

The orchid houses lay in dense shadow, but the doctor almost threw himself against the door.

"Strike a match!" he panted. "Never mind—I have it!"

The door flew open with a bang. A sickly perfume swept out to them.

"Matches! Matches, Rob! This way!"

They went stumbling in. Robert Cairn took out a box of matches, and struck one. His father was farther along, in the center building.

"Your knife, boy—quick, quick!"

As the dim light crept along the aisle between the orchids, Robert Cairn saw his father's horror-stricken face, and saw a strange green plant growing in a sort of tub, before which the doctor stood. Four huge, smooth, egg-shaped buds grew upon the leafless stems. Two of them were on the point of opening, and one already showed a vivid rosy flush about its apex.

Dr. Cairn grasped the knife which Robert tremblingly offered him. The match went out. There followed a sound of hacking, a soft swishing, and a dull thud upon the tiled floor.

As another match fluttered into brief life, the mysterious orchid, severed just above the soil, fell from the tub. Dr. Cairn stamped the swelling buds under his feet. A profusion of colorless sap was pouring out upon the floor.

Above the intoxicating odor of the place, a smell like that of blood made itself perceptible.

The second match went out.

"Another!"

Dr. Cairn's voice barely rose above a whisper. With fingers quivering, Robert Cairn managed to light a third match. His father tore out a smaller plant from a second tub, and ground its soft tentacles beneath his feet. The place smelled like an operating theater.

As the third match went out, the doctor swayed dizzily, clutching at his son for support.

"Her life was in it, boy!" he whispered.

*(This series will be concluded in the November number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)*

"She would have died in the hour that it bloomed! The priestesses were consecrated to this. Let me get into the air!"

Mr. Saunderson, silent with amazement, met them.

"Don't speak," said Dr. Cairn to him. "Look at the dead stems of your Mystery. You will find a thread of bright hair in the heart of each!"

Dr. Cairn opened the door of the sick room and beckoned to his son, who, haggard, trembling, waited upon the landing.

"Come in, boy," he said softly, "and thank God!"

Robert Cairn, on tiptoe, entered. Myra Duquesne, pathetically pale but with that ominous shadow gone from her face, turned her wistful eyes toward the door; and their wistfulness became gladness.

"Rob!" she sighed—and stretched out her arms.

### LOVE'S PROSE

I know it is the poet's way,

But, though my honest speech undo me,  
Lovelier than stars, and dawns, and flowers,  
My dear, you're all a woman to me!

So I'll not vow your eyes are stars,  
Nor that your lovely cheeks are roses,  
Nor call your blush a summer dawn;  
Sweeter than any song love's prose is.

I've sworn I'll never say to you  
Your teeth are pearls, your lips are rubies;  
Let other poets, if they will,  
Repeat such things, like witless boobies!

Yes, I refuse for similes  
To ransack all earth, air, and ocean;  
You're not a fawn, nor a gazelle,  
Nor swan that goes with slow, grave motion.

I'll take you, dear, life's highest worth,  
A woman needing no apology—  
You're not a gaudy jewel shop,  
You're no compendium of zoölogy;

No hamadryad on a lawn,  
No nymph that lurks in ancient story;  
A woman—that's enough for me;  
I can conceive no further glory!

Harry Kemp

# Money to Burn

WHY GRANDPA WINCH INSISTED ON LIGHTING HIS STOGIES  
WITH TEN-DOLLAR BILLS

By Ellis Parker Butler

A DETECTIVE off duty can be as human as any other man, and take his pleasures the same way, as far as I've been able to notice; and if I like a little game of poker, with the stakes not too high for my spare change, that's nobody's business but my own.

Some of the folks around and about Westcote kicked a lot about this Wahtawah Club of ours, one time and another. They said it was a gambling den, and ought to be shut up, but there was nothing to all that. The law is mighty clear on that subject. Nobody ran any game for profit at the Wahtawah Club, so it was not gambling.

The only trouble was that the club had those rooms over the post office, third floor, and to some it looked bad to see the blinds pulled down and the place lighted up two or three o'clock in the morning, when everything except the All Night Lunch was dark and deserted. But all there was to it was that a bunch of us used to go up there, Friday nights especially, and play cards awhile and maybe drink a little beer and eat some sandwiches and drink some hot coffee that Mike sent up from the All Night Lunch.

Taking it one way and another, if you can stand for poker and a few bottles of beer, the Wahtawah Club was as decent a little joint as a man ever saw. I never knew a man to lose more than ten or twelve dollars there. I never knew a man to get drunk or noisy, and I never knew any of the fellows to cut loose and do anything rash or raw, except this old pink-cheeked grandpa named Franz Joseph Winch.

That was sort of funny, too, because Winch, to look at him, wasn't the sort of man that would burn a copper cent, let alone a five-dollar bill; but burning five-dollar bills was his high suit.

Up in this Wahtawah Club you didn't find any of those marble statues and velvet curtains and deep-pile carpets that you find in a genuine gambling joint. There wasn't anything on the floor but cigar ashes and stubs, and not a thing on the walls but the plaster the builder put there. The shades over the three windows cost thirty-five cents apiece. I know, because I bought them myself.

There were eight card tables, an old secondhand pine kitchen table, and a pine box we used to chuck the decks of cards in until the next time. The chips we generally left on the table. After we had been going a year or so, we spread ourselves and bought eight tin cuspidors at twenty cents apiece; and that was about the size of the Wahtawah Club.

A mighty good all-around lot of fellows we were, too. It was "Hello, Bill!" and "Hello, Jim!" and "How's the old scout feeling to-night?" and pull up the chairs and start in. The beer stood at the back of the big table, in bottles, with the glasses in front, and a beer-opener handy; and when one of us wanted a drink, he got up and got it. This was before prohibition, and nobody thought much of a glass of light beer in that crowd. It didn't mean any more to them than water, and it wasn't really much stronger.

The big hanging lamps went with the room. The owner was always talking about putting in electric, but he never got around to it, and we never cared much. After we had been in the room half an hour, you had to sort of grope for your cards through the tobacco smoke, anyway.

We were all sorts of fellows. We had an alderman, and six or eight business men, and two doctors, and all sorts—just good fellows, if you know what I mean.



One night the alderman brought this old pink-cheeked grandpa, Franz Joseph Winch, up to the rooms, and gave us all a knockdown to him. Seems that Percy—the alderman's name was John, but we all called him Percy, because he wore one of these cutaway coats, with a vest with a white linen business pinned inside the front of it—Percy had a house, and had rented it to this old Franz Joseph Winch. He got acquainted with him that way, and thought he was a fine old boy. Grandpa—we called him that right from the start—had a wife and two grown daughters who lived with him, and I don't know how many who didn't—maybe some, and maybe not any. The old lady was a fine old dame, and the girls were nice, too. In fact, they were just a nice, respectable family, but well fixed—plenty of money.

It seemed, from what Percy told us, that Franz Joseph Winch had lived in Westcote when he was a young fellow, and had clerked and done one thing and another around town until he was about thirty. Then he went West for all of thirty years more, and made his good money. Now he was back, and past sixty years of age, with nothing to do but take things easy and enjoy life the best he knew how.

Out where he came from, he had always sat in at a poker game at the Commercial Club, and he had got so it was bread and meat to him. It was by asking Percy if there was any Commercial Club in Westcote where he could riffle a deck now and again, that he heard of our little Wahtawah Club.

That was all right. One or two more or less made no difference to us, as long as they were the right sort, and we gave grandpa the glad hand.

That first night, if I remember right, grandpa lost something like eighty-five cents, and he entered it in a little notebook he kept in his pocket. He always entered what he won or lost in that little notebook, but that did not amuse us much. Several of us did the same thing. It was a sort of game to figure up whether a year's playing brought us out ahead of the game or loser.

The thing that did give us a jolt was what grandpa did one night after he had been spending his evenings at the Wahtawah Club for about two weeks. It was along about two in the morning, and we had cashed in and squared up, and were ready to sit back and have a last glass of

beer and talk over how the hands had run, when, all at once, grandpa finished figuring up his winnings up to then. He took out a stogy—he always smoked stogies—bit off the end, reached into his pocket, and took out a five-dollar bill.

"Well, boys," he said, "I'm a winner. I've got money to burn. Here goes!"

With that the old fellow folded the five-dollar bill four or five times lengthwise, making a sort of spill of it. Then he reached up to the top of the lamp chimney and held the end of the bill over the flame until it was afire. He held the bill until it was almost burned down to his fingers. Then he lighted his stogy with it, and finally dropped the burning stub into the cuspidor.

"My gosh! What did you do that for?" one of the fellows asked. "That was good money!"

"Money to burn!" grandpa said, and swelled out his chest. "Money to burn, boys!"

## II

WELL, we let it go at that. We chaffed the old boy a good deal, and thought he had perhaps had too much beer. Getting a little too much warmed up that way sets some folks bragging, and burning money seemed to be a sort of brag; but it was mighty funny, at that, because you would never have looked to old grandpa to do a thing like that—never!

You've got to get this old fellow into your mind. Make him about five feet two inches high. If you say an average man is five feet eight, and then take six inches off him, you'll see that grandpa ran below the middling quite considerable. Then think of him as thin—thin and delicate, and dressed in neat black clothes, like a deacon or something. Then get his face thin, with about the last pair of white mutton-chop whiskers left on earth, and nose glasses with gold rims and a little black cord coming down and around his neck. Pink face—gentle blue eyes—take him all in all, and you'd say grandpa was a real nice little old lady.

And then imagine him standing up and patting his chest and sticking a five-dollar bill in the lamp and saying:

"Money to burn, boys!"

You couldn't quite get him, could you? Well, neither could I—unless he had had too much beer.

I've heard of a man who was always meek and gentle and subdued, who came home from his only banquet of the year, where some one had served champagne. When he reached the front door, he tried to steady himself, swaying back and forth from his toes to his heels, and said to his wife:

"Wife! Listen, wife! The only trouble with you, wife, is that I've always been too good to you!"

And then he went in'o the house and went to bed, and for another twenty-five years he was meek and gentle and subdued. His one outburst in fifty years! I thought maybe it was something like that with grandpa; but that was where I was good and fooled.

Less than a week later, the nice old boy broke loose again. Same place, and pretty close to the same time of morning—same general layout—grandpa looking at his memorandum book and counting up his wins and losses. Then out comes the stogy, he bites the end off, and out of his pocket comes a nice crisp five-dollar bill.

"Well, boys, I'm a winner again," he said. "I've got money to burn once more. Here goes!"

And the old codger folded up that nice, crisp, useful five-dollar bill and held it over the lamp chimney until it was well ablaze. Then he leisurely lighted his stogy with it, and threw the burning remainder into the cuspidor.

That night I happened to walk home with grandpa and Percy, and when we had left the old boy at his door I walked on with the alderman.

"What do you think of grandpa and his conflagration of five-dollar bills, Percy?" I asked. "Ain't he the gay young kid? Ain't he the cut-up?"

"Beats me," Percy admitted. "He looks such a staid old party. I don't know that I can make head or tail of it myself. Maybe it's a custom he learned out West there—one of the wild West yee-ow stunts. Shouldn't wonder if that was it. I can see the gentle old lad out there, not stacking up one, two, three with those noisy boys where the sky is the limit, and all the time wishing he dared break loose and behave as those red-blooded men do, where the sky is a little bluer and men are men, and all that sort of thing. Can't you imagine him out there, afraid to utter a faint peep in that land of rattlesnakes and two-gun

men? And then, when he gets back here among us effete Cholly boys, just thinking he can be the very devil and all? The way some of those farmer lads from Iowa, that come East to write stories, buy a Stetson with a rim half a mile wide at the first hat store they strike south of the Bronx."

"Maybe so," I said. "Do you think it is real money? I can't say I got a good look at it myself. Might be stage money, mightn't it?"

"Well, yes, it might," Percy agreed. "I never thought of that."

"I'll try to get a better look at it, if he does it again," I said. "Looks rainy, huh? Well, so long!"

And old grandpa did it again, too. Maybe it was a week later, and maybe two weeks, when out comes his memo book, and out comes the stogy, and out comes the five-dollar bill.

"Well, boys, I'm a winner again," he says. "I've got money to burn. Here goes!"

And *that* five-dollar bill goes up in smoke!

I had been sitting next to the old lad right along, meaning to get a good look at his money the next time, if I could, and I did get enough of a look at it to know it was none of your stage money. It had all the look of real money, as far as I could see. Anyway, it was none of this phony stage stuff with green print on one side and "Use Blahblah's Stomach Bitters" on the other.

"I wonder," I said to Percy, when we were walking home that night, "if the old lad has been buying green goods! It might be that," I said. "He might have run across one of these green goods men and bought a ream or two of counterfeit bills, some time or other; and maybe now he is having his little bit of fun burning them up. Have you noticed he always takes them out of his pocket?"

"That's so," Percy admitted. "Maybe that's it. We'll just keep a better lookout on him, and see whether that's so or not."

### III

So, you can see, grandpa and his money to burn got to be a sort of interesting little subject with Percy and me. It did not amount to much, but it was something to be amused over and to try to figure out. It gave us something to talk about besides politics, and the weather, and how odd it

was that I hadn't anything much bigger than a jack in my hand all evening.

By and by, one night, out comes grandpa's memorandum book, the same as usual. I was banking that night, and grandpa won a dollar and thirty cents.

"You get a dollar thirty, grandpa," I said. "Got change for a five?"

"I certainly have," he said.

He dug into his pocket and brought out three one-dollar bills and seventy cents in silver, and put them on the table. I shoved a five-dollar bill at him. Grandpa picked it up and gave it a glance.

"Well, boys," he says, "I'm a winner again. I've got money to burn. Here goes!"

He didn't do any sleight of hand business, either—not, at least, that I could notice. He folded that bill into a spill and held it over the lamp until it was ablaze, and then he lighted his stogy and threw the burning remainder of the bill into the cuspidor.

I looked at Percy and nodded, to tell him it was a genuine five-dollar bill. Percy nodded that he had seen it, too, and that it was indeed so.

One of the fellows—Henry, I think it was—spoke up.

"My eye, grandpa!" he said. "You oughtn't to burn up good money that way. It's all well enough once in a way, but you oughtn't to keep it up. It's waste—sinful waste."

"You watch my smoke," grandpa said, grinning. "I've got money to burn, I tell you!"

One of our fellows was a trustee of the hospital in our town. He spoke up next.

"It is a waste," he said, quite serious about it. "If you've got so much money to burn, why don't you give it to the hospital? We need it the worst way. This year our deficit is going to be—"

We never did hear what the deficit was going to be.

"Never you mind, son—never you mind!" grandpa said. "I've got money. I'll look out for your hospital, up to my limits, when the time comes. This is my burning money. Nobody can tell me what to do with my money. I burn it, or I don't burn it. Here goes!"

And what did the old codger do? He felt in his pants pocket, dug out a small roll of bills, chose a nice, clean new one, folded it up, stuck it in the lamp flame, and

burned it. He didn't light a stogy with it. He just naturally held it in his fingers and watched it burn to nothing—a perfectly good five-dollar bill!

"And I've got a couple more here, boys," he said, running his finger along the edge of the roll. "Any more objections? If so, I'll burn another."

Nobody offered any objections. We just naturally hated to see good money burned that way, and if anybody had let out a peep the old fellow would certainly have burned another—maybe two or three. We all had a feeling that it wasn't right for us to egg him on to any such foolishness.

It was his weak spot, that money burning idea, it seemed to us. It was what he was childish about—that's what we thought. If we fussed too much about it, he might get stubborn and burn a whole wad of his money, just to show that he was its boss, and that he was his own boss, and that he could do what he pleased with it.

"All right, grandpa—all right!" I said. "Have it your own way. We all waste a little of the long green in our own ways, I guess, and we have no kick coming."

So he put his roll back into his pocket.

I talked the matter over with Percy that night, as we walked home together.

"I hate to say so, Percy, about such a nice old boy," I said; "but it does look to me as if grandpa was a little off in the upper story. About that money burning thing he's so fond of—what do you think?"

"Well," he said, "it don't look exactly rational, does it?"

"It looks plumb crazy to me," I said. "I'm going to speak to him about it, and see if I can make sure he is crazy, or make sure he is not crazy."

"Go 'at him easy, then," Percy said. "He's a nice old fellow, and, if you come right down to it, I don't know that it's any of our business. He has a lot of money, or so I guess."

"How do you know he has?" I asked. "Did he show it to you?"

"No," Percy said; "but he says he has."

Well, I did two things. For one, I went to the bank—the Westcote National Bank, the only one we have in Westcote—and got a private interview with the cashier. I admit I used my badge on him, just to make him open up a little, if I could, for the cashier is a tight-mouthed old fish if ever there was one. I asked him how Franz Joseph stood.

"We can't give out any information about our customers," he told me.

"Then he is a customer here?" I said.

"Yes, I can say that much—he is a customer here, and a depositor, and one of the best depositors we have. He carries an entirely satisfactory balance."

"Well, just as man to man, and not talking bank at all," I said, "do you think the old boy is worth a million dollars?"

"No," he said; "but he is worth every cent of half of it."

"A couple of five-dollar bills would not mean much to him, then?" I said.

"He could afford to lose a few without suffering great privation, I imagine," the cashier said with a rather sour smile; "but if you mean it would not hurt his feelings to lose a few five-dollar bills, I am not so sure. Mr. Winch is not reckless with his money. As a matter of fact, speaking in the utmost confidence, and as man to man, I think he is the tightest wad in Westcote. A month ago we made an error in our favor of twelve cents in figuring interest on his account, and he raised 'Hail Columbia.' Yes, I can say that Franz Joseph Winch only cares a little more for a penny than you care for your right leg. As a matter of fact," said the cashier, "I wouldn't care if he took his account out of the bank. He is the closest, penny-paringest old rascal I ever had dealings with. He cares more for a dime than I care for a hundred dollars, and I'm not reckless with money."

"I'll say you're not!" I said.

"And it angers me doubly," the cashier said, "because he knows well enough a bank has to make a living, the same as anybody or anything else has to. He once worked in a bank. He worked in this very bank, and now he acts as if a bank could live on air. He—well, I can't give away the bank's secrets, but he demands one per cent more interest on his balance than we ever gave any one before."

"He must have a lot of money here, then?" I said.

"I said his account was satisfactory," the cashier replied.

That was all I could get out of him; so I went and had my talk with grandpa.

I went at him gently. I began by talking about the four kings he had held last Friday night. I went on to talk about the Wahtawah Club, and veered around to his burning five-dollar bills.

Right there he stopped me. He wouldn't

hear a word from me about that. He got red in the face, and his blue eyes snapped.

"Once and for all," he said, "I will not be bullyragged about that! No, sir! It's my money, and I'll do as I please with it. If you, or any of you, bother me about it again, I'll bring a whole sheaf of five-dollar bills down there and burn the whole lot in the cuspidor, as sure as my name is Franz Joseph Winch! Let that suffice! No more of it! Will you have one of my stogies? No? I don't blame you. They're vile, but they're cheap."

And the next week he burned another five-dollar bill.

#### IV

THAT night, going home with Percy, I talked the whole thing over. I told him all I knew about it, and how the cashier of the Westcote National had said grandpa was naturally close with money.

"It looks bad to me," I said. "It looks to me as if he had that one screw loose in his headworks. I wonder if there would be any way of getting a talk with his folks—you know, just a little confidential talk with his wife, or one of the girls?"

Percy thought awhile.

"Do you think you ought to?" he asked then.

"Well, if a man is crazy—" I said. "Look at the tight-fisted old coot he is, hugging a nickel until the buffalo bellows, and playing his cards so close to his chest they fall inside his vest when he drops them; and then look at him burning up good five-dollar bills! It looks crazy to me. He might get a notion to burn his house down, or something. If I was his wife, I'd like to know about it."

"I think I can fix it to have her see you," said Percy, and he did.

Grandpa's wife was a nice old lady—lovely! They had fixed the house up in fine style, refined and everything, and she had me in the parlor. I felt pretty much hands and feet—like a railroad spike in a jeweler's tray of diamond lace pins.

She listened to me until I was through, and I was pretty sure she got what I was driving at. Then she held one of her hands in the other and looked at me.

"It is kindness of heart that brings you to tell me this, dear boy," she said. "My old heart thanks you for it, you may be sure; but what Franz does is right, as far as I am concerned. He has been a good,



kind husband to me these many, many years, and everything we have has come to us through his efforts. I don't think a wife should interfere with her husband's simple pleasures. If my dear Franz finds pleasure in a game of cards with his friends one night a week, I am glad it is so."

"I know, ma'am," I said; "but it's not the card games I am thinking of—it's the money."

"He would not lose more than he could afford to lose," she said gently.

"What he loses is none of my business," I said. "I'm talking about the five-dollar bills he burns up."

"And that is none of our business, either, is it, good friend?" she said, not mean, but as sweet and gentle as possible. "That is for Franz to do as he pleases, is it not?"

"You don't think it shows he is—well, ma'am, a little touched, maybe, on that subject?"

"Ah, a man must have his amusements!" she said.

That was all she would say—what Franz did was right. Well, she was one fine old lady. I'm in love with her yet.

I told Percy the outcome of that little interview. He listened, and didn't have anything much to say to it. He said he guessed the old lady was about right, and made some general remarks that the world wouldn't be so much the worse if there were more like her.

That was all very well, too, but old grandpa and his five-dollar bills had got on my mind, and they worried me. I'm a detective, as I said before. Some folks think one way and some another, but I've always said that detectives who amount to a hang have a detective sense—if that is what you would call it. I mean they can smell a rat if there is a rat. They say, in their minds:

"There's something wrong there. I don't know what it is, but there's something wrong."

If you see a seaplane skittering along on the surface of the water, and, all of a sudden, it leaps into the air and skips over a yacht or a schooner, you don't think anything wrong. If some hard-going sport had burned five-dollar bills, I wouldn't have thought anything wrong. On the other hand, if you see a nice old family sailboat sailing over the surface of a bay, and, all of a sudden, that sailboat leaps out of the water like a flying fish and does a loop-the-

loop, and then drops back and goes sailing along like a common sailboat again, only to hop up and do another loop in the air, you think something is mighty funny about that sailboat. If you've got any curiosity in your system, you want to know what's wrong with it.

"Look here!" I said to myself. "You're a detective, but you're a mighty poor one if you can't find out what's the matter with grandpa. Have a try!"

So I gave my mind to the job, just for the fun of the thing, and because grandpa was a nice old fellow. If he was going nuts or anything, I wanted to help him to steer away from it.

I said no more about his five-dollar bills, but I watched. I watched the old fellow burn five or six more, up there at the Wah-tawah Club, and I watched with all the brains I had in my head. I watched close, like a cat watching a mouse; and by the time I had watched grandpa burn those five or six, and my head had registered every little thing my eyes could see, I added one and one together and I got two. Understand? I got a corner of something I could take a grip on.

All those five or six five-dollar bills that grandpa burned were notes of the Westcote National Bank!

So I watched for the next one he burned, and—sure enough—that was a Westcote National Bank note, too.

"That's a lead," I said to myself. "That means something. When the old boy takes out his roll and burns a strip of money, he always picks out a Westcote National Bank note. That ought to mean something. Is he so mad at that bank that he burns its money, or what?"

I didn't know enough about money to figure that out, so I went to the cashier of the Westcote National again.

"See here," I said to him. "If I had one of your bank notes, and it fell in the fire and burned up, could I get the money back?"

"No, sir!" he said. "Not unless, maybe, you gave a permanent bond to us for double the amount, or something like that, and took your oath that the money was burned up, and that you knew it was our note; and maybe not then."

"I'd lose it, then, would I? I'd be out that five dollars?"

"You certainly would."

"And how about your bank?"

"Our bank would be five dollars ahead," he said. "That note is our promise to pay five dollars. If that note is destroyed, or utterly lost, we don't have to pay that five dollars. We are five dollars ahead."

"That so? That's interesting, ain't it?" I said.

I thought that over, and thought through it. The next time I met grandpa on the street, I asked him to go up to the Wah-tawah Club with me and hear something. It was afternoon, and we would have the club to ourselves.

"Now, grandpa," I said, when I had got him up there and had lighted a cigar, and he had set one of those stogies of his afire, "I want to talk to you like a Dutch uncle. I'm your friend, see? This is for your own good. You've been burning money, haven't you? Well, I just want to say that I've noticed you don't burn anything but West-cote National fives—see? And what I notice somebody else might—see? I'm all right, and I'll never utter a peep, but you never can tell what some other fellow may do. If I was you, I'd cut out burning money in public. Take a wad of it and burn it in your furnace, if you want to, but don't do it before folks. How much more have you got to burn?"

Well, the old boy got red in the face. He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a good roll of bills. Then he looked in his memorandum book and figured it up in

his head, and he peeled off eight five-dollar bills from his roll. He held them out so I could see there were eight, and then he crumpled them up, put them in the cuspidor, and set a match to them.

I sat there and watched them burn—all eight of them Westcote National Bank notes, too.

"There!" he said, when they were ashes. "That's all. I've witnesses to every dollar. I feel better!"

"Well, that's all right, then," I said.

I was getting out of my chair, ready to go about my proper business, but he put his hand on my arm.

"Not crazy," he said. "Not touched up here," and he tapped his forehead with his finger. "Conscience money," he said, and looked me full in the face. "I worked in that bank once," he said. "I was a fool—I got away with two hundred dollars that belonged to them. It has worried me half a lifetime. Now I've paid it back, and I'm clean again. This," he said, "is just between you and me."

"Oh, sure!" I said.

"Will you have one of these stogies?" he asked, pulling one from his pocket.

"Go 'way!" I said, and I gave him a poke in the ribs. "I may be a friend, but I don't have to be a martyr!"

"I like 'em because they're cheap. No man ought to burn good money," the old boy declared.

#### BEFORE DUSK

THE sunrise is an opal tower,  
The noon a golden tent;  
But sunset is a rose-hung bower,  
Dim, redolent.

The sunrise has no secret stair  
To any still retreat;  
The noon has never shadow where  
Shy souls may meet;

But sunset has a hidden place  
Of hushed and tender gloom,  
Where growing buds of hope have space  
And dreams may bloom—

One dream as white as lilies are,  
That gleams as lilies do,  
And one that blossoms like a star—  
Two dreams of you!

*Nelle Richmond Eberhart*

# Decent Things

## THE STORY OF AN INTERESTING SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

By Edgar Franklin

Author of "Regular People," "A Noise in Newborn," etc.

OLD Stephen Valmer believes that the salvation of modern civilization depends, not on the degenerate rich, but on the sturdy qualities of the lower classes. He therefore decides to use part of his wealth for the benefit of poor girls, who, with proper training, might become the mothers of a better generation. His lawyer, Penning, advises him to try out the idea, first, with one girl; and the opportunity is offered to May Allers, who works at the Mors Stamping Mill. May, an ambitious girl, jumps at the offer, and goes off to Boston with Mrs. Fairson, whom Valmer has engaged to train her.

Stephen Valmer's household consists of his two married daughters, Edith Dinsmore and Ina Fayles, and their husbands. A nephew, John Valmer, formerly lived with him, but John is a young man of strange ideas, and has decided to go off and earn his own living—which he is doing in the Mors Stamping Mill, under the assumed name of Jim Hammond.

The second installment opens when May Allers, with her training completed, and her Christian name improved to Mary, is brought to the Valmer home by Mrs. Fairson. Naturally, Stephen's daughters are greatly perturbed by the unexplained arrival of the girl.

### VIII

QUAINTLY correct to the last, Mrs. Fairson had chaperoned Mary even into the Valmer library. Now, fully recompensed and adequately praised, the dignified lady was rolling down to the station in the Valmer car, on her way back to Boston—while Mr. Penning merely sat and stared numbly.

A rather cynical and skeptical person after his own harmless fashion, Penning just then was thunderstruck. The exquisitely beautiful young woman over there could not possibly be the May Allers they had interviewed in the den upstairs, on that startling evening three years ago!

That individual had been cheaply flashy as to garb; this one was—well, neither more nor less than perfect, from her demure little pumps to the distracting natural wave of her coiffure. That girl had been harsh of voice and brazen and suspicious of eye; this young woman spoke softly, giving one the impression of generations of culture behind her. Her eyes—why, they were the most beautiful eyes Penning ever had seen! They were clear and cool and fearless, and they were deep and very intelligent, too.

Mr. Penning's rather bewildered gaze settled upon Stephen Valmer, and he grunted. The poor old soul was fairly babbling his pleasure. As he examined Mary, just after her arrival, he had babbled at Mrs. Fairson. Now, much more moderately, he was babbling over Mary alone.

"Next, as to you yourself, my child," her benefactor was saying. "Are you thoroughly satisfied?"

"With all that you've done for me, do you mean, Mr. Valmer?"

"Let us say, rather, with the change that has been wrought."

Mary dimpled entrancingly.

"'Satisfied' doesn't express it, of course," she said. "I'm more grateful than I shall ever be able to tell you. It—oh, it has meant just everything to me! All that I ever wanted—and I know now that I wanted a great many things I didn't understand at all three years ago—you've given me, and—"

"Penning, is it marvelous?" Mr. Valmer demanded.

"It is," admitted the attorney.

"Is it incredible, Penning?"

"Very nearly that."

"But does it in every way justify my absurd little notion?"

"Yes," Mr. Penning conceded.

"It does indeed, Penning," Stephen said dryly. "I wish now that I'd started with at least twelve of 'em, as I intended originally. I beg your pardon, my dear. You were saying?"

"I was trying to tell you how grateful I am," Mary laughed.

"Let's say no more about the gratitude. What comes next?"

"For me?"

"Exactly."

Mary's little smile grew earnest.

"I'm glad you asked that, because I do want your advice," she said. "I've been thinking about it this last year, of course, and I've tried to talk with Mrs. Fairson about it, but she's so—well, noncommittal, as a rule. She always seemed unwilling to advise anything at all, and she can turn off a subject in the nicest and gentlest way! I think I should make a good enough social secretary."

"Eh?"

"I'm sure that I should. If I can find a position that would leave me a little time, I thought I'd take a thorough course at one of the good schools, and then see if I couldn't find a place with some sort of future, in one of the big corporations."

"You're talking about going back to work?" Stephen rasped.

"To another sort of work, of course."

"Well, that's not at all what I've contemplated for you," Mr. Valmer said testily. "My endeavor, with you, has been to produce a very fine woman, Mary—not by any manner of means a very fine business woman."

"Can't they—er—go together?"

"Not in this case."

Mary smiled faintly.

"Well, I'm afraid they'll have to, in this case," she said; "if you're kind enough to consider me a very fine woman. I had a good many rough spots, and most of them have been smoothed away. I've loved it all more than you or any one else can ever understand, Mr. Valmer; but—one has to go on living!"

"Well?"

"And earning something to live on, of course," Mary said rather blankly.

"And live where, by the way?"

This time Mary's smile had vanished altogether.

"I've thought a good deal about that, too. At home, with my family, I suppose;

or perhaps, if mother and dad don't mind too much, I might have a little place of my own, as soon as I'm able to afford it—just a room or two, and—"

"Exactly!" Valmer said briefly. "Two of 'em—one big, one little—upstairs."

"Here?"

"To be sure, my child! Your little nook is ready and waiting. Barton will show you there in a few moments. You will take your place here as a member of the family," Stephen pursued, with the utmost placidity. "My daughters will welcome you. Their friends will be your friends."

"But—"

"May we not consider that part as settled?" Mr. Valmer asked gently.

"Why, no, I—I'm afraid we may not," Mary said. "You mean for me—just to live here?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"Indefinitely, of course," Stephen said rather impatiently.

"Oh, but I couldn't possibly do that!"

"Why not?"

"Well, because—because it isn't done, I suppose," replied Mary. "I've accepted too much from you already, Mr. Valmer. I was greedy for all that I wanted so badly, and I—I suppose I didn't waste much thought on the ethics of the thing; but now it all seems so entirely different that I couldn't possibly turn into a mere parasite. You've done more for me than I can ever hope to repay, but—I must make my own way henceforth."

"You don't intend to leave this very instant?"

"I—I think so," said Mary.

"My dear child," Stephen Valmer said comfortably, "do you really wish to repay me!"

"If I could!"

"Then may I point out that to all intents you are still a laboratory specimen?"

Mary laughed softly.

"That was such a funny idea!"

"It was nothing of the kind!" Stephen said irritably. "It was a perfectly serious and earnest idea, with a great purpose behind it. Ask Penning! What you have been through in the past three years was merely preliminary. What I wish to do now is to keep you under my eye, Mary, and observe you, more or less casually, for an extended period."

"Well, that's the sweetest way of put-



ting it, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart," said Mary; "but I think I must go, nevertheless, and—"

"Sweetest way be hanged! It's nothing of the kind! It's what I wish to do, young woman," Stephen rapped out. "You're at a point to which you have been brought by an expenditure of time and care and money. You yourself have gained something, of course, but through you and through me the whole race is destined to gain infinitely more—that is, of course, if you elect to remain."

"I—don't understand," Mary faltered.

"And I don't intend to fill you with a lot of idiotic self-consciousness by sitting here and expounding a dozen of my theories," Mr. Valmer snapped. "You're of age and your own mistress, Mary. If you choose to go, you will go; I can't detain you here against your will. You will simply have forced me to find another young woman and to begin all over again. If, on the other hand, you feel yourself indebted to me, you'll stay."

"And then?"

"Merely endeavor to forget that you were ever anything but a member of this particular circle, my child, and go on with the not necessarily difficult job of living. You're a very beautiful and charming girl. You will marry, and—"

"Oh!"

"Not immediately—eventually.. Well?"

Mary's eyes were distinctly troubled. Round, frank, and searching, they studied her benefactor for many seconds, finally roving to Mr. Penning.

"Is this just Mr. Valmer's way of being kind?" she asked abruptly.

"Not in the sense that you mean," replied the attorney.

"But would it really be ungrateful of me to go?"

"Rankly so, my dear," Stephen said cheerfully, as Mr. Penning's lips opened. "Well?"

"Well, if that's actually so, of course—" began Mary. and the line between her eyes deepened.

"Oh—er—Barton!" Stephen called.

The butler paused in his passage past the partly open door, and entered.

"Miss Allers's trunks have arrived here, Barton?"

"They are in her room, sir."

Stephen Valmer popped out of his chair, beaming.

"Now, my child! If you'll just run up with Barton and make sure that everything is to your liking?" he said in conclusion.

When they had departed, his beam turned on Mr. Penning.

"Well?" he demanded triumphantly.

"She's very charming—very!"

"Drat her charm! I'm not concerned with her charm, except incidentally. Penning, three years ago that girl grabbed everything in sight without a quibble. Now she is very much disturbed about accepting a bare living. She has developed!"

"She has done all of that. Don't look at me like that, Mr. Valmer; I know what you mean, and I take it all back," said the attorney. "You're vindicated in every respect. You have done something extremely fine—something you'll always be able to look back upon with pleasure and real satisfaction and—"

"Done it? I haven't begun to do it!" Stephen grunted. "However, the main point is settled—it's beautifully feasible. Now let's get down to business in real earnest."

"Er—what business?"

"That of the Valmer Foundation, of course."

"The what?" said Mr. Penning.

"The Valmer Character Foundation—the thing I've mentioned."

"You've never mentioned that in my hearing!" the attorney gasped.

Stephen frowned and shrugged.

"Is that so, Penning? I fancied that I had. Doubtless I failed to mention it because I seek to distress you as rarely as may be," he said dryly. "Nevertheless, that's the name of it, and that's what it is to be. Not advertised, you understand. Not even incorporated, I think, although it may be a good scheme to incorporate later on. Don't look at me like that, Penning! I have no intention of rushing headlong into the affair. I plan to set aside only one million dollars for the beginning."

"One mil—" gurgled in Mr. Penning's throat.

"How much are you making a million dollars earn for me?"

The attorney recovered himself and smiled dizzily.

"One of them, sir, is bringing in very nearly eighty thousand dollars a year, and—"

"We'll take that one," Stephen decided. "Now, let's see. Quantities always cut

costs, don't they? We can handle a batch of twelve girls on that income, Penning—possibly even one or two more. It has occurred to me, too, as very probable, that by the end of the first year we may be able to pick out the potential successes, and so eliminate whatever apparently hopeless cases may appear. In that way—oh, just sit back and stop your confounded fussing, Penning!" said Stephen, as he started for the door. "I've made a quantity of notes on this subject, and I'll run upstairs and get them while—ah, Ina! I didn't know you were at home. Hello, Edie! You here too?"

He paused and treated his daughters to his beaming smile. Ina and her sister, sauntering in with the most carefully casual effect, stared hard at him for one tiny, startled instant, and then sought to beam in return.

Smiles from Stephen Valmer were a trifle rare. Deep down, rather naturally, he was as fond of his daughters as any other father; but outwardly, these last few years, he had radiated disapproval—of their friends, of their habits of thought, of their manners, of their general lack of purpose.

The consequences had been logical enough. To Ina and her sister, their father had become a person to be handled with gloves. One never irritated him, if diplomacy and, lamentably, a total lack of frankness could avert that disaster.

So Ina merely smiled, with a winsome and childlike effect, as he said:

"I wish I'd known that you were about! You might have met—er—"

He paused, his eyes twinkling. Mrs. Fayles, for another tiny instant, studied the twinkle. She turned one shade paler.

"Oh, the—er—girl that Barton just took up to the blue room?" she hazarded.

"Ah! You saw her?"

"Just a glimpse."

"You found her a very charming and beautiful young woman, I trust?"

Mrs. Fayles, as did her sister, turned another shade paler. As one, they glanced swiftly at James T. Penning.

No marble statue ever owned eyes more blankly expressionless than those of Mr. Penning at that moment—in itself a bad sign. Abruptly, Ina forced her smile back to its post of duty.

"Why, so far as one could judge from a very brief glimpse—yes, of course," she said easily. "But—who is she, father?"

"She is the first, my dear, of a series of very interesting experiments," Mr. Valmer stated blandly.

"Of—of a what?"

"A series of experiments of the most absorbing character, although you would no doubt be rather bored than otherwise by a description of them just now."

"Oh, but I'm sure I shouldn't, father!" Mrs. Fayles said quickly.

"And I am equally sure that you would," Stephen returned firmly. "Permit me, please, to go on to what I really wish to say. Mary is now part of the household."

"Mary!" breathed Mrs. Dinsmore.

"Mary Allers—yes. Well?"

"What—what part of it is she?" Ina managed.

"Broadly, a member—or, it might perhaps be better to say, a permanent and highly esteemed guest."

It may have been the utterly complacent quality of his smile, and its astonishing breadth, that brought from Mrs. Dinsmore the sharp reply:

"Yes, but *who* is she, father? *Why* is she here? You can't very well reach out and produce a strange female, just like taking a rabbit out of a hat, and make her a member of your household, without—"

"Really? And pray why not?" Stephen interrupted.

"It's a trifle too original!"

"Bah!" said Mr. Valmer, thus disposing of that objection. "Mary is in no sense a strange female, as you put it. I have known her for some three years. She is here because I wish her to be here. Is that sufficient?"

"Decidedly not, father!" Mrs. Dinsmore responded hotly, for she owned most of the temper of the family. "After all, we do know a few people, and they're the right sort. A woman nobody ever saw or heard of can't simply be paraded before them without explanation. She has some status here. What is it?"

"That of a guest," Stephen said, with commendable patience. "Is there anything extraordinary about having a guest? Your right people have them—or don't they?"

Quite nimbly, Ina stepped into the breach.

"Why, of course they do, dad," she said. "Edie didn't mean to suggest that there was anything extraordinary about it, but

—well, you want us to help entertain this particular guest, don't you?"

"I hope, and I'm sure, that you will be the warmest of friends, Ina."

"Well, then," the younger daughter said soothingly, "we can't very well be warm friends without knowing who she is, can we?"

Mr. Valmer's eyes continued to twinkle as he considered Mrs. Fayles for a moment.

"Sounds odd, Ina—I concede that; but I'm sure that you can. Suppose, for the present, we say that Mary is simply one of us, and let it rest at that? Oh, there's no deep mystery, you know. I'll tell you all about her eventually, but for the moment there are reasons. I don't want the girl quizzed about herself, either. Please remember that!"

"Well?" breathed Ina.

"Well, now, as to what I wish you two girls to do," Mr. Valmer pursued. "First, I wish Mary to become one of your own particular circle—really one, you know."

"You—mean that you want her presented formally, like a *débutante*?" Mrs. Dinsmore asked thickly.

"Not too formally. You can attend to that in your own way, so long as the girl is properly introduced. I'm not much of a society person, you know," Mr. Valmer said impatiently. "Just how will you manage it?"

During these last fifteen seconds Mrs. Dinsmore had been staring fixedly at Penning, and at last the lawyer was giving a sign—the smallest nod, but unquestionably one of assent. A tremulous sigh came from Mrs. Dinsmore. She pulled herself together and faced her father.

"We—well, there are three or four of the girls coming in for luncheon to-morrow. That would make some sort of beginning," she murmured. "And there's an informal dance out at the country club—horribly informal—they all are. Then we might have a tea for her—say Wednesday of next week. Will that do, father?"

"Nicely, I should think."

"Only—dad!" Ina said gently.

"Well?"

"It's quite all right, of course, all of it; but some of the people we've known for a good while, and we *do* value their opinions. Do you know this Miss—"

"Please call her Mary."

"Mary, then. Are you intimately acquainted with her?"

"I have seen her, I think, five times, all told, including this afternoon," the remarkable Stephen declared.

"Er—yes! Well, don't you think, then, that before presenting her to anybody at all, it would be wise to let Edie and me get acquainted with her, so that—"

"You may make sure that she's acceptable," Mr. Valmer concluded for his daughter, and the enigmatic triumph of his smile was perhaps the most puzzling thing he had ever presented for the inspection of the two young women. "Will you step upstairs with me immediately, my children, and—get acquainted with Mary?"

## IX

AFTER dinner they held council in the Fayles' suite—Ina and her husband and the Dinsmores. It was distinctly a secret gathering, accomplished deftly enough by their inconspicuous vanishings, one by one, from the family circle downstairs. If there was a chair, it was occupied by Edith.

"Well?" she said, when Mr. Fayles had browsed around for an ash receiver and settled down in his favorite corner. "We've gathered, automatically, to discuss her, haven't we?"

"Obviously," Fayles grinned.

"Do you know, Henry," submitted his sister-in-law, "I fancy that it's time *you* told something?"

"I?"

"Father consults you, you know, about a great many things he never bothers mentioning to any one else."

"I know he does, Edith, but he never consulted me about Mary, I assure you." Mr. Fayles grinned at his cigar. "I wish he had!"

"Why?"

"Because I'd have advised him to get her here sooner. She's a pippin, and just about as bright as they come!"

"Really?" breathed Ina.

"As a matter of fact, he's right," her sister conceded. "The girl's as pretty as a picture and—oh, apparently nice in every way. Only—how about you, Wells? Has father ever spoken of her to you?"

"Father rarely speaks of anything to me," Mr. Dinsmore said wearily, and shaded a nicely judged yawn, which indicated total lack of interest.

"That's not answering Edie's question, though," Ina said.

"Has to be answered directly, does it?"

All right! Father, then, has never even suggested to me the existence of the young woman. I never heard of her, Edith, before you surged in with your eyes spitting fire—you look unusually well when they're spitting, honey; you ought to do it oftener—and told me about her. Is that enough?"

"Oh, I suppose so. We're not getting ahead very rapidly, are we?"

Mr. Fayles chuckled again.

"When a taciturn and slightly erratic individual like your father springs a high-class mystery of this kind, one doesn't hop to the correct answer in five minutes," said he. "By the way, does Barton know anything about her?"

"Barton!" said his wife, and flushed. "I don't know, Henry. I think he does. I—well, I tried to sound Barton before dinner."

"And?"

"Well, I didn't get down on my knees, but I did suggest that there might be a ten-dollar bill for him," Ina snapped. "All that Barton did was to shake his head and repeat that he couldn't say. He wasn't even decent enough to tell me whether he knew anything about her or not!"

"Penning, then, Ina? You're usually able to wheedle information out of Penning, you know."

Mrs. Fayles's color grew a trifle higher.

"I know that, but it was no use at all this time. I asked him flatly who Mary was, and where she came from, and why she was here—everything we've been wondering, of course—and he faced me with that fishy stare he can do so well when he wants to, and said that a lawyer couldn't very well discuss affairs which his client desired to keep secret."

"Admitted that much, did he?"

"Virtually."

"Well, that's kind of funny in itself, isn't it?" yawned Mr. Dinsmore.

"Not of necessity," said Fayles, who was by far the soundest reasoner of the group just now. "How about making a few inquiries of father?"

"We did," his wife said briefly.

"I know, and he put you off, of course; but I imagine that if you went to him again and—well, just pointed out, patiently and pleasantly, that he had created a rather unusual situation for everybody concerned, the girl included, he might see the wisdom of telling—"

"Oh, you ought to know father better

than that by this time!" Ina said impatiently. "He'll tell just what he's sweetly pleased to tell about anything, and a herd of wild horses couldn't drag one single fact from him that he didn't feel inclined to divulge!"

"Well, the girl herself, then?"

"We don't dare!" Edith snapped. "Father forbade it, absolutely. He stressed that again, just before dinner, and he was quite emphatic about it. Under no circumstances is she to be quizzed!"

"And poor little Mary behaves as if she assumed that she had been explained to the highly interested family—which she probably does assume," Fayles mused. "Everything else apart, it's a bit rough on her to—"

"Never mind poor little Mary!" Mrs. Dinsmore all but hissed. "We—oh, why do we beat about the bush like this? Why don't we face the thing?"

"Face what?"

"Is father infatuated with this Mary person, or isn't he?" demanded the elder daughter.

Ina's lips compressed suddenly. Mr. Dinsmore gasped faintly. New ideas always met his brain with quite an impact. Fayles, however, merely threw back his head and laughed.

"At least, he's not that!" he said.

"How in the world do you know?" Ina asked fiercely.

"Well, I'm not particularly bright, perhaps, but I'm willing to give odds of a hundred to one, or so, that I can tell whether a man's in love with a woman, just by watching the way he looks at her for ten or fifteen minutes. Moreover, it's always a lot more obvious when a chap of father's age begins to lose his head. No—nothing like that's afoot; but there's something mighty odd about the way he stares at that kid. Like a scientist squinting through a microscope at something on a slide—that's as near as I'm able to hit it. Cold and impersonal, you know, but distinctly interested."

Mrs. Dinsmore's eye, hard upon her husband, was hot and cynical. Ina, however, nodded.

"He's right about that. I noticed it too," said the younger sister.

"Well, you'll pardon me," remarked Edith, "for lacking faith in this coldly impersonal interest when—"

"Oh, that's what it is, whether you lack



faith in it or not," Fayles broke in. "Privately, I think there's a great deal of excitement here about nothing whatever. You'll find, when father's pleased to explain, that the answer is perfectly simple. Perhaps he's adopted the kid."

"He hasn't!" Ina said shortly. "I got that out of Penning. He said father had never mentioned such a thing to him at any time."

"All right! Then she's the daughter of an old friend, at another guess. Did he ever have an old friend named Allers?"

"Not in our time."

"It's thinkable that he may have had friends before you were born, my dear," Fayles grinned. "That, in all probability, is the nearest we're going to come to the truth for the present. And now may I just make one little speech?"

"Go on!"

"Well, it's admitted that this girl is nice in every way, isn't it—quiet, agreeable, and at least as cultured as any of us?"

"That's just it!" Edith cried. "She does seem nice, and—she can't be, very well. What's a nice girl doing—"

"And father unquestionably wishes her to be here?"

"Oh! Unquestionably!"

"Well, there's nothing much wrong about your father, Edie. I've never known a man with any higher principles," Fayles said seriously, "or with much better poise, taken all around. This is all a trifle odd, but it's not the first odd thing that he's done. There's always a beautifully robust possibility that father is having a little joke!"

"He never tried that sort of joke before!" Edith said acidly.

"Well, dad never repeats a joke," declared Ina. "He's punctilious about that!"

"Precisely. And here's still another point, which I'd also be willing to back as being somewhere near the answer—father doesn't quite approve either of you girls. Mary, on the other hand, looks like old-fashioned stock with old-fashioned training. Maybe she's here as an uplifting example."

"Ugh!" shuddered Edith.

"And whatever she may be, or for whatever reason she may be here, I suggest that we should just take the kid for what she seems to be, and should consider that she belongs."

Mr. Fayles's whimsical grin appeared again, and he waited for comment. Six eyes regarded him meditatively. Ina shrugged rather helplessly.

"Is there anything else that we can do?" she murmured.

"Nothing. And if we're satisfied to do that—"

"*She* ought to be—yes!" Mrs. Dinsmore concluded spitefully.

## X

IN point of fact, Mary was by no means entirely satisfied.

Not hypersensitive, perhaps, she was nevertheless too keenly observant. The studied carelessness with which one member of the family drifted away after another, while she herself rather diffidently demonstrated to Mr. Valmer how little he really knew of chess, was rather painfully significant to Mary.

They seemed to be avoiding her. Well, if it came to that, why shouldn't they, if they chose? Mr. Valmer, very likely, had been enlarging on her progress for a matter of three years—which was his privilege, too. They had probably failed to share his enthusiasm, and, to all intents, had remained their exalted selves, while Mary remained the factory girl—than which, to be sure, nothing in the world could have been much more natural.

Mary had heard a good deal of Stephen Valmer's daughters and their husbands from Mrs. Fairson—of the glittering suitors who had besieged the young women, and of the ultimate victors, scions of the ancient houses of Fayles and Dinsmore. Had she expected to be taken to their respective bosoms? Emphatically, she had not!

They had been nice enough at dinner, though, hadn't they? Having for no obvious reason anticipated a rather uncomfortable meal, Mary had been pleasantly astonished to find herself quite at home in an easy and rather gay atmosphere. Stephen's hour for dry witticism seemed to be dinner time. Mary had laughed quite sincerely at him, even if the others had only smiled perfunctorily.

There had been one unpleasant note, in a story, of considerable breadth, which Dinsmore chose to tell; and another, to Mary's mind, in the fact that Dinsmore's wife, with never a suggestion of disapproval, only laughed boredly at it. Curious

ous that it should flash back so suddenly, but Mary had been reminded of that dreadful evening, four years ago, when Tom Masters, dining with them, had seen fit to relate a rather similar anecdote, although not nearly so broad, and had been ordered from the flat by Bill Allers. Times change, of course, and evidently they allowed themselves a little more latitude in this upper atmosphere; but no stories of that kind had ever ventured into the Fairson circle.

Mary did wish that, if they really were avoiding her, they had left without that indefinable little sneaking effect, and—oh, she felt that she was wholly, utterly absurd! She devoted herself to chess, and sought an early bed, relaxing gloriously.

She suddenly opened her eyes to bright sunshine.

She was still vaguely uncomfortable. A good, sharp gallop usually dispelled that sort of thing. Stephen had startled her, last evening, with the news that her horse from the Fairson establishment was even then in the Valmer stables. Mary took to the back roads and journeyed far, returning after noon, to find Ina Fayles looking for her.

"Good gracious! You have energy, haven't you?" that young woman observed. "I haven't been on a horse for two years. We thought you'd left for good, Mary. This luncheon's an early affair, you know—they want to go over to some fool tournament at Galton."

"I'm sorry! I'll hurry and dress."

"Don't! Breeches are all right for this crowd. Come along!"

"Oh, but will they—"

"They'll like you just as you are, Mary," Ina said cheerily; "and you'll like them. They're a good lot!"

Later, in the strangest way, small, dumfounding doubts began to creep into Mary's consciousness.

They were, of course, a good lot. They were the very people with whom, in her wildest dreams of three years ago, Mary had yearned to mingle. They were traveled and sophisticated and decorative, and none of them lacked animation—so much, at least, must be conceded. Even a transformed Mary, habituated to the better things now, should have been thrilled, if only just a little. And yet—

The sharp-faced girl with the thick, dark hair was a Mrs. Milner, and it appeared

that Mrs. Milner had been having some trouble with her husband. It was trouble of a sort which might have been discussed a little less fully and with a shade less frankness; but for a time, as one of the rather rapt circle of listeners, Mary sought to appear sympathetic.

It seemed, presently, that at the culmination of the trouble—which had been reached at a Southern resort—it was not the moral foot of the husband which had slipped, but that of Mrs. Milner herself. Now, as Mrs. Milner put it, the gentleman was "sulking" somewhere afar, and if there really was any truth in the rumor that his trip had some connection with the fact that a well known dancing young woman had left her company last Saturday night, and disappeared, Mrs. Milner vowed to divorce him relentlessly.

While Mary regained normal respiration, the very dark girl, a Miss Forbes, commented at length upon the unfortunate affair. Her language, which suggested that of a muleteer distinctly out of temper, did not seem particularly to horrify the gathering, but it sent a succession of cold chills through Mary.

Through a cloud of cigarette smoke Miss Forbes propelled her views, which were positive and radical. She shortly passed from a survey of the case in point to a general consideration of sex relations. Moral—or immoral—equality, Mary inferred, had already been attained, but was not yet openly conceded by that fraction of the population still saddled with inhibitions and hypocrisy. Viewed from any possible angle, marriage, as an institution, was little short of a disreputable, ghastly crime. The goal was freedom, utter and absolute; and Miss Forbes's expounded conception of freedom, it occurred to Mary, would almost have warranted a descent of the police on the Valmer mansion.

Molly Sand, a quiet little thing with bobbed hair, came in for attention. Molly, evidently, was one of the kind that must be drawn out, and it was not such an easy process; but she did confess, eventually, that a certain man had gone back to Chicago, and had married a girl with whom he used to go to school, somewhere in central Illinois.

Details, mercifully, were suggested rather than related; but for some absurd reason, it seemed, Molly's father was insisting that she should give up her down-

town studio and return to the family circle. After a time Molly, at best a weakling, began to cry a little. This drew down upon her Miss Forbes's wrath, as that lady pointed out the shameful folly, the abjectness, of the one-man attitude, considered from the mental, the moral, the physical, or any other standpoint.

Like a breeze from the open came the chatter of the solidly built girl just opposite Mary.

Dorothy Masters, just at that time, had gone quite mad on the wholesome gasoline motor. She had taken the new car's engine down from one end to the other, and had put it together again. Further, as Mary heard hungrily in snatches, she had shot big game in Africa and in India, she had hunted moose in Maine and ducks on Long Island, she had drawn from its native element everything finny, from brook trout to tarpon.

The rest of them were not feverishly interested, but Mary found her eyes clinging to Dorothy. When, quite suddenly, the two found themselves alone, the main body having hurried aloft to inspect a certain new coat of Ina's, a remark escaped Mary:

"You look real!"

"Hope I am," Dorothy laughed. "Why not?"

"I mean that you're different. You're—I'm not sure just what I do mean."

"Decenter?" the other girl suggested wonderingly.

"I suppose that's it."

Miss Masters's unrestrained laughter rang through the room.

"It's not possible that they shocked you?"

"Isn't it?"

"Evidently it is, then! I—why, that's perfectly incredible—Mary, is that your name? I didn't know that there was any one left in the world who could be shocked. I say, you're not just out of a convent?"

"Not exactly, but something rather like it, I fancy," Mary sighed. "May I ask what will sound like an odd question?"

"Shoot, my dear!" Miss Masters said cheerfully.

"Well, then—are they all like this?"

"All Ina's gang, you mean?"

"More than that—all rich people—that's what I'm trying to say. I'm poor, you know."

"So am I—beastly poor," the other girl said, although the wonder still lingered in

her eye as she considered Mary. "I give it up. No—I suppose they're not, if it comes to that. Some of 'em do seem to make a business of taking the lid off the garbage pail and leaving it off, don't they? On the other hand, I'm bound to admit that I know some pretty prim people, here and there—not so many of them, and most of them are pretty elderly, but enough of 'em to prove that old-time respectability still exists."

"But can it be that these girls really—" Mary began.

"Oh, bunk!" said Miss Masters. "This particular crowd's pretty raw, Mary, but my private idea is that they take most of it out in talk. Forbes, for example. I have a notion that if a caveman really swooped down on Forbes, and tried to carry her off without benefit of clergy, he'd wind up in a police station. I don't know. Maybe not."

"You're not much interested?" Mary asked curiously.

"Not terribly. Are you, really?"

"Yes!"

"Why?"

"Because I had always supposed that people with plenty of money went after the best things in life, and not the worst."

"Well, that's a quaint thought!" the Masters girl laughed. "What difference does money make? Aren't there just as many rotters among the downtrodden poor as there are in this element?"

"No, I don't believe there are."

Dorothy shrugged as she found her own cigarette case and reached for the matches.

"Maybe you're right, Mary. Maybe it's just this crowd of Ina's, and crowds like it. Edie and Ina move among the very best people when they feel so inclined, you know. They must know how to mind their p's and q's on occasion, or the very best people would throw 'em into outer darkness; but perhaps the very best people are a good deal the same themselves, and—oh, look here! This thing's getting a bit deep. Let's drop it!"

"Very well," Mary sighed.

As she snapped her match into the tray, Miss Masters stared once more at Stephen's product.

"Well, don't look so frightfully distressed about it, you dear, lovely, funny little creature," she chuckled. "You'll get used to 'em in time."

"Do you think so?"

"Of course! And even if you don't, Mary, take one little piece of advice—don't show it quite so plainly."

"Why not show it?" Mary flared. "Does one have to be ashamed of wanting to be decent?"

Dorothy Masters, clearly no uplifter and repairer of worlds, blinked tolerantly at Mary and yawned.

"Guess not, strictly speaking," she said, smiling faintly. "Only, first and last, I'd say that one might stand to miss an awful lot of fun!"

## XI

INA's reappearance put an end to the conversation. It was resumed, rather oddly, on the side veranda of the country club, just before midnight.

Mary had been deserted, in distinctly mysterious fashion, by her partner—a certain Bobby Parks, who, fortune favoring, would graduate from one of the bigger colleges a little later in the spring. He had brought her here with much solemnity and had cautioned her to remain here; and now Mary was waiting, somewhat amused and a little puzzled.

Dorothy Masters appeared, quite alone.

"Have you seen Willy Trent?"

"I don't know him," said Mary.

"A blond young man, underfed and slightly drunk."

"I've seen several of them that seemed slightly drunk, and one or two were blond, but—no, I don't think he has passed this way while I've been here."

Dorothy Masters looked only slightly annoyed.

"Bobby planted you here to wait for him?"

"Yes."

"That's his regular trick about this time of night," mused Dorothy. "Where is that little fool, anyway? I saved him this next dance, because he threatened to weep in public if I didn't."

"You're not actually counting on it, are you?"

Dorothy glanced quickly at her.

"Good Lord! You aren't horrified at the dancing, too?"

"I'm not horrified at anything," Mary replied, a little impatiently.

"You look—"

"Well, at least, I'm not going around with my hands in the air, trying to reform the world, if that's what you mean. I like

to dance, and this sort of thing is well enough for any one who fancies it, I suppose; but personally I'm not partial to being hugged, and massaged, and so on. Is it always like this?"

Miss Masters leaned against a pillar and considered her with a frown.

"Mary, *where* did you come from?" she asked.

"Boston."

"I thought it must have been Mars, my child! I—what did you ask me? No, it's not always like this—that is to say, it hasn't always been."

"Oh!" said Mary. "I thought—"

"Well, you were wrong. This is mild, you know, Mary—very, very mild. You should have been around the club here last winter. The board had to get together, finally, and lay some few restrictions on the informal affairs. Shame, too, that was! Four or five of the boys just quit cold."

"Too bad!" mused Mary.

"That's sarcasm, isn't it?" smiled Miss Masters, and it was apparent that her interest in Mary had begun to dwindle. "You're really thinking—"

"You'd never guess what I'm really thinking. Have you ever been in the halls where working girls—factory girls, that is—do their dancing?"

"I never have, Mary. Have you?"

"Yes! They have one or two very capable people on the floor to oversee the dancing. When any one tries *this* kind of thing—and it seldom happens—they're requested to leave the floor—and they do leave, too!"

Mary's cheeks reddened and her eyes snapped. Miss Masters remained entirely unimpressed. Indeed, nodding slowly and with the smallest touch of disgust, she opened eyes wherein interest in Mary Allers was moving swiftly toward the vanishing point.

"Go! your number at last, my child!" she cried softly. "Settlement worker—really serious person. That's wicked! I thought that you were just a simple kid, and that we'd make you a member!"

"I—"

"*There's* that little rat, after all," Dorothy said, and paused just an instant to lay a hand on Mary's arm. "Here's your Bobby boy, too. Mary, just one more piece of advice!"

"Yes?"

"Put on your shell-rimmed spectacles



again, and live up to 'em—or else forget you ever owned a pair," breathed Miss Masters, and hurried off.

Young Mr. Parks, lurking mysteriously at the angle of the veranda, approached nimbly.

"Dot tryin' to horn in?" he queried.

"With us?"

"Aha!"

"No, she was—"

"Well, she didn't get away with it, anyhow. Wise kid, Dot! Regular two-fisted guy, too, but wise. Any other wise ones watchin' us?"

"Apparently not. Why?"

Young Mr. Parks wagged his head with exceeding caninness.

"This is important, kid!" said he. "We're not dancin' this one, you know—sittin' it out!"

He gripped her arm and led her toward the stairs.

"Summerhouse!" he hissed. "Don't look behind you. They know me—they watch me!"

Plainly, he was being humorous after his own fashion. Mary laughed, and hurried along at his side. They turned out of the drive, some forty feet beyond the clubhouse, into a narrower path, which wound away into pitchy darkness, Bobby's not too welcome grip still upon her arm.

"This," Mr. Parks said at last, with much satisfaction, "is it—and we are still alone. Step right in!"

"Isn't it a little secluded?" Mary asked, hesitating.

"Not near secluded enough," the young man chuckled, from the depths of the summerhouse. "Mind the step—that's it. Hah!" There was a creak as he sat down. "Say, the punch was rotten, wasn't it?"

"I just tasted it."

"Don't blame you; too rotten to do more than taste once. Makes a man sick, to come home for a day or two and find that nothing's any better, anywhere. Old club's turned into pure cheese. Might think there was a revenuer on duty to analyze their damned punch, when—where the Sam Hill are you, Mary?"

"Right here."

"Still standing?"

"Yes."

"Cease standing and sit down, kid!" Mr. Parks commanded jovially, and the hand that caught her wrist dragged Mary abruptly to the rustic seat beside him.

"Now! I always deliver a short lecture first, you know. Listening?"

"I'm listening."

"In the first place, there's nothing ordinary about this—get that, my dear?" the rather incoherent young man explained. "What I mean is, it's nothing that anybody can just go out and buy. Comes in by airplane, straight from where they know the real goods and treat 'em as such! Can you beat that?"

"Er—I suppose not."

"No! Dumped in a quiet little spot—oh, away up near the border. If you want it, you drive up yourself and get it. Butch Garraway and I made the last trip, and they were some roads, too, this time of year. Stood the pater two new cord shoes and a rear spring, even if he don't know it yet." Mr. Parks laughed gayly, and from his section of the gloom there came a faint clinking and some impatient muttering. "Say, Mary! How fussy are you?"

"What do you mean?"

"This cup thing sticks, you know—always does when I'm trying to entertain a lady properly. Oh, all right! Stick and be damned! *Here!*"

Cold metal suddenly met Mary's hand.

"Take her straight from the flask, Mary! Being done a lot this year, but it does seem sort of indecent when you've only known a girl for an hour."

"What is it—whisky?"

"Whisky? *Nectar!*" Mr. Parks's slightly awed voice said. "Nectar the high gods would have climbed clean down to earth just to sniff!"

"Well, I don't care for any nectar, thank you!"

"Huh?"

"Please don't stick that thing under my nose again," Mary said sharply. "I don't like the smell of whisky."

"Why, Mary, this is all right!" the astonished young man assured her. "It couldn't possibly be any more all right. Been right down there in my locker ever since we hauled it in, and I've got a fastening on that a safe cracker couldn't get through. Just sneak down and fill up the little tank here on occasions like this, and—oh, don't be afraid, Mary! I don't blame you. Some of the stuff's enough to take the paint off a ship, but *this*—"

"Thank you, *no!*" said Mary.

There was a small, thunderstruck pause.

"Say, is this some new fad?" young

Mr. Parks asked. "D'ye know, you're the second girl this week to refuse a drink!"

"Really?"

"Positive fact, my dear!" sighed Mary's escort.

There was another pause, which was one, apparently, of pure delight, for gurglings came through the darkness, followed, eventually, by a long breath.

"Heigho! You're just ruining this party for yourself, Mary."

"Perhaps," said Mary. "If the ceremony's over, shall we go back?"

"Oh, not yet! We didn't come out here just to go back."

"No? Why did we come?"

Mr. Parks relieved himself of a low, rich, pleased laugh.

"'Tis something new!" he stated. "This other girl I mentioned handed me the same line. Honey, we're wasting an awful lot of time, aren't we?"

"Yes!" Mary said tartly.

"Ha! That sounds kind of sane and natural and encouraging!" Mr. Parks cried, and, slipping a strong arm about Mary, he dragged her to him. More than this, his free hand went under Mary's chin and turned it upward with a jerk. "Few seconds, there, I'll swear you had me guessing!" he chuckled. "Oh, you little—"

"Let me go!" Mary gasped.

"Hey?"

"Let me go!"

Young Mr. Parks giggled joyously.

"You've got about as much chance of gettin' away as a—" he began. "Hey!"

Through the gloom, something resembling a distant pistol shot echoed. Its source had been in the meeting of Mary's firm palm and Bobby Parks's plump cheek.

"Now will you let me go?" Mary panted. "You—you unspeakable—"

"Oh, I say, Mary!" a voice said gently, from just outside the summerhouse. "I'm here if you need me, you know."

"Who's—that?" Mr. Parks managed.

The vines rustled. It seemed that some one had thrust in head and shoulders from the outer side of the skeleton structure.

"Name's Dinsmore," that gentleman's languid voice chuckled. "You run along now, Bobby, like a good little chap!"

"Say! What the—" Mr. Parks began, bewildered.

"Because, if you don't, 'pon my word, I'll totter in and tell your father about his two cord shoes and his busted spring!" the

lazy voice chuckled further. "Ha! That got you, did it?"

Young Mr. Parks, apparently, was leaving. Behind him trailed a sulphurous muttering. Wells Dinsmore strolled into the summerhouse.

"Rather lucky I was out there—eh, Mary?"

"I—yes—thank you very much. I couldn't have believed—"

"Oh, no end of young bounders like Parks around, you know," Edith's husband sighed. "Sit down again, Mary, for a minute, and calm yourself. Feathers all ruffled up?"

"I'm afraid they are. I hadn't expected anything like that."

"Never can tell what 'll happen to an unprotected young girl these days—if she's on the square, as you are, I mean," Mr. Dinsmore said, without great indignation. "All right now, though. I'm glad I came down here to the favorite old nook! Always sneak away from these infernal dance-fests when I can, you know. I simply can't stand 'em. They're nothing at all for a man who thinks, or tries to think, intelligently."

"No, I really don't think they are, Mr. Dinsmore."

"Going to call me Wells, weren't you? Father specified that."

"Wells, then," Mary smiled.

"No, they're not," the gentleman pursued sadly. "And I do try to do that—think intelligently, I mean—even if I get mighty little credit for it."

"I'm sure—" Mary began vaguely.

"Or no credit at all—that's nearer the truth. Fact is, Mary, I'm rather a misunderstood man. Not making a bid for sympathy or anything like that, but nobody seems to understand me."

"Your wife, of course, least of all?" Mary queried dryly.

"Gad! Have you noticed that, in just the little time you've been around?" Dinsmore cried. "Why, that's remarkable! That's positively astounding! That's—that's—"

"What I meant—"

"I know just what you meant, but I had no idea it was so obvious," Mr. Dinsmore went on fervently. "Fact is, it's not, to most people, Mary; it's only a girl like you who can see the truth so readily. Not saying a solitary word against Edie, you understand. Edith is wonderful!"

Only, she's Valmer's daughter, and I—I'm nobody. Never had a chance to be anybody, Mary, because nobody ever really understood me; but *you* do!"

"Do you have to hold my hand to tell me this?" Mary inquired.

"I'd love to, if you don't really mind," Edith's husband stated, and tightened his grip. "It's the dearest and softest little hand, all—all full of character and understanding," he added, and broke off with a very effective sigh. "Mary!"

"What?"

"Do you believe in love at first sight?" asked Mr. Dinsmore.

"What?" gasped Mary.

"Because I never did, but I do now," the gentleman hurried on, and came much closer. "Mary, when I first saw you—yesterday, it was, and yet it seems as if we'd known one other for ages. Perhaps we have, Mary! That sort of thing does happen; two people meet and—and love, and then meet again, centuries later. When I first saw you—"

"Wait a minute!" Mary said, with some difficulty.

"But—"

"You're what is crudely known as a fast worker, aren't you?"

"Oh, but, I say, Mary! When a—man loses himself—when he bares his heart to a girl because something—er—stronger than himself seems to grip him—"

"Well, I don't like fast workers any better than I like that Parks boy's liquor; and I have a particular antipathy to them when they're married. I consider you, Mr. Dinsmore, a particularly cheap cad. Is that sufficiently specific?"

"It—it—gad, it's murder!" Mr. Dinsmore stammered. "That's what it is, murder, when a chap feels as I do! It's as heartless as—where are you going, Mary?"

"Home."

"Oh, but—I say, don't do that! Don't race off like that, Mary!"

"Why not?"

"Make talk, you know. They're a savage lot of gossips around here. And, what's more, if Edith—"

"I'm not going to tell Edith about you," Mary said disgustedly; "but I'm going home."

She was out of the summerhouse now, and walking toward the club, with Mr. Dinsmore trailing after her in some mental perturbation. It was a night of unseason-

able warmth, and several of the couples were strolling about in the outer air—almost respectable couples, Mary reflected with a little shudder, since at least they were not publicly making love.

There, too, was Henry Fayles, alone with his cigar, looking at them in his rather keen fashion. There was something stable and virile about Henry, too. He lacked Dinsmore's decorative effect, and, Mary felt with a grateful throb, probably lacked the undesirable qualities that went with it.

"Trying to outdistance Wells?" Henry inquired curiously, with his little smile.

"I—no, I'm just going home."

"Not so early?"

"I think so. Will you—or Mr. Dinsmore can do that—just say that I have the traditional headache, or something of the kind?"

"Let Wells do that," Fayles said suddenly. "I'll take you home, Mary."

"Thank you."

"Run you right back in my own car, child," pursued Mr. Fayles. "Shall I bring it around while you're getting your wraps, or shall I get the wraps and walk around to the garage with you?"

"The latter, if you'll be so good."

Fayles sped away. Dinsmore, having twice glanced uneasily from Mary to his wife, who stood chatting in the open doorway of the clubhouse, came to a reasonably intelligent decision and lazily ascended the steps.

Mary, her lips tight, moved on a little distance. Very shortly Ina's husband had placed the cape over her shoulders and was walking at her side.

"Something has upset you, Mary," he stated. "What was it?"

"Nothing."

"Something has, nevertheless," Fayles insisted. "I wish you'd tell me."

"There is really nothing to tell."

"Wells has been up to his regular tricks, perhaps?"

Mary said nothing at all. Fayles glanced down at her softly, almost tenderly, and smiled a little. Then he glanced over his shoulder. Behind them nobody was in sight.

"Mary, I wish you'd be quite frank with me," he said gently. "Whatever the rest of them may be, you can trust *me*, and—"

"Mr. Fayles!"

"Eh?"

"Is it really imperative for you to put

your arm around me, to assure me of that?" Mary demanded desperately, as she stopped short.

"Er—no, probably not," Fayles laughed, and dropped the arm. "No idea of offending you, Mary, or—"

"No, I understand!" Mary said bitterly. "You're not the pretty type, like Dinsmore. You're the self-contained, patient, he-man variety, quite sure of yourself, and—oh, I think you're beastly! Is that Mr. Valmer's chauffeur, over there by his car?"

"Seems to be; but I'm going to drive you home, Mary, and—"

"But you're not!" the girl corrected. "Jenkins!"

"Yes, miss?" said the Valmer driver.

"Take me home, please, and then come back for the others," Mary said, as she stepped in. "No. Mr. Fayles isn't coming with me."

Stephen had long retired when she reached the house. This was rather fortunate, for in that feverish hour Mary was entertaining certain pronounced views about Mr. Valmer's family which she could hardly have refrained from communicating to the gentleman himself. With her lips even tighter, she hurried to her own rooms and locked the door. The lips relaxed only when, after a period of angry tossing, she fell asleep.

The habit of early rising had never been cultivated by the other ladies of the household, who were rarely in evidence much before noon, but it remained strong in Mary. She emerged from an unpleasant dream and made instinctively for her riding clothes. Then, just as instinctively, she turned away from them with a frown, and ended by donning the simplest little gown in her rather extensive collection. This morning, at least, Mary was not perfectly attuned to the wealthy state.

She breakfasted hurriedly and alone, causing Barton to grow quite solicitous about her lack of appetite. She hurried from the house, too, and into the clean outer air and the bright sunshine. Down near the gateway of the Valmer estate, almost hidden by a budding bush, she sat down upon a stone bench—to think.

Something was radically wrong.

In a hazy way, something had been wrong for weeks, but it was acutely and painfully wrong this morning. Once upon a time, she had craved what had seemed

decent things. Well, she had plenty of them now, and to her possibly archaic way of thinking they were a long, long way from being decent. Why, at home, even in these modern days, people like Bobby Parks and Dinsmore would have been in such complete disfavor that they would have been almost certain to ride away in an ambulance after colliding with Bill Allers's fists. Brutal and elemental and uncultured and all that, but still—decent!

That wretched word seemed to be playing havoc with Mary this morning, just as it had done once before, if in another manner.

With her hands clasped, she gazed gloomily down through the gateway toward the State road. Mary had reached that distressing condition where, with all one's desires realized, one finds genuine happiness quite as distant as before. In fact, in all her days she had never been more thoroughly wretched than she found herself just now.

Well, there must be a sufficiently simple answer. Surely the whole population of this presumably rarer atmosphere couldn't be of the same stripe. And yet, to the casual observer, that gathering at the club last night had been quite normal. Mrs. Fairson, as Mary recalled vividly, had piled veto upon veto, when one or another member of her own little circle had suggested bringing this or that friend to the house. So perhaps the hideously great majority *was* just as—

Mary started suddenly and leaned forward, her eyes upon the road. Red color surged to her cheeks, too, and her eyes sparkled strangely. For the moment, Mary even ceased breathing.

## XII

FARTHER forward leaned Mary—and then, with something of a jerk, she sat back again; but her eyes did not leave the gateway and the road beyond. From that direction there came a cheerfully whistled tune and the sound of a firm, quick step.

There was the broad-shouldered figure in the very plain sack suit and the curly hair and all. She had not been wrong—it was none other than the apparently unvamped Jimmy Hammond, of the Mors mill—*coming in here!*

Just why she should have been so much startled at the phenomenon, Mary did not pause to wonder—though she knew, of



course, that in the nature of things he should have been at work at his press at this hour. It—it—no, it wasn't the man himself who had caused the excitement in her gentle bosom. It was what he symbolized so perfectly—the free, clean independence, the self-reliance and—

"*Huh?*" escaped the approaching Mr. Hammond, as he stopped short just inside the gate.

In his own way, he seemed quite as much dumfounded as had Mary—which was inexplicably disconcerting, and caused her flush, just subsiding comfortably, to mount again. Hands hanging limp, chin thrust out, mouth open a little, he remained motionless for a matter of seconds; but after that his smile came suddenly—an unbelieving, wonderful smile. His hat came off, and he advanced upon Mary Allers quite as if expecting to see her vanish suddenly.

"It—it *isn't* you, is it?" he asked.

"It is—I!" Mary confessed.

"No, but I mean—well, I know I'm an idiot, of course," the young man floundered. "I probably look like an idiot, and I feel like one in asking such a thing."

"Asking what?"

"Well—say, you'll forgive me, but I can't help it—did you ever work in a stamping mill?"

"Yes!" said Mary.

"The—the Mors place, about three years ago?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I'll—say, I—well, upon my word!" gasped the newcomer.

He seemed unable to get any farther. Certain changes came to his apparently fixed smile, however. The quality of humor entered, and his eyes twinkled. Thrice he essayed speech before he succeeded in saying:

"Well, dog-gone it! I might have known it all the time, if I'd been born with brains. You were there just for a lark!"

"It—it wasn't much of a lark," replied Mary's strangely numbed tongue.

"No, but you thought it was going to be when you undertook it, I'll bet; and it would have been, if you had tackled it in the right spirit. They're an awfully good crowd down there, once you're used to them, or if you really like them as—as much as I do." The enthusiasm of the young man's speech dwindled in the most peculiar way as his gaze remained fixed

upon Mary. "And so, after all, you were a rich girl!"

"I—no!"

"You know what I mean—not one of the crowd in the mill, of course. I'm so infernally thick that it never even occurred to me! Ten minutes' thought at any time wouldn't possibly be one of them. I say, I'm not insane, you know!" the young man declared, drawing rein suddenly. "I forget that you don't even know me!"

"Why, yes, I do!" Mary said quickly, and managed to blush even again.

"What?"

"That is, I—I mean, I remember—seeing you down there and—"

"*Really?*"

"And I know your name is Hammond, and—and that's really all I do know, of course," Mary concluded bravely.

A long, slow, remarkable breath fluttered from Mr. Hammond's lips. His smile, it appeared, was a permanent expression.

"Oh, that's wonderful!" he whispered. "I never thought that—well, by the way, all I ever knew of you was that your name is Mary Allers. That's not your real name, of course, but—"

"It is, though!"

"Is it? Well, it's a beautiful name—Mary!" the other rambled on.

Quite uninvited, he seated himself beside her. A little space he devoted entirely to consuming Mary with his eyes.

"You know that you covered your tracks remarkably well, young woman, don't you?" he said.

"Why?"

"That girl you used to travel around with—what's her name? Oh, Jenny Ross, I believe. Well, when you disappeared so suddenly, I—I—well, I asked Jenny what had become of you, and where I could find you, because—well, I asked her, at all events, and she refused to tell me a single detail about you. I asked her half a dozen times, all told, until I began to feel it was getting a bit ridiculous. I never could understand just why she wouldn't tell, but I do now!" he ended, with a chuckle. "And if only—"

"Are you still working there?" Mary asked suddenly.

Mr. Hammond, his smile departing at last, nodded.

"Yes, I'm still there—or yes, ma'am, I suppose I'd better say."

"You'd better say nothing of the kind!" Mary said crisply. "How is it that you're not there this morning?"

The newcomer gravely studied his twiddling hat.

"There was a little job up here I had to do," he explained.

"For Mr. Valmer?"

"Yes."

"You know him?"

"I know him a little, and he—he knows my work. This job he—er—thought nobody else could do, so I had to get the morning off and come up and attend to it."

"Odd!" breathed Mary.

"His thinking that nobody else could do the job?"

"I didn't mean that, Mr. Hammond. I meant that it was odd that you should have turned up in this particular place just when I was thinking of the factory."

"Do you think about it sometimes?"

"Naturally."

"But you don't wish you were back?"

"No—I don't know that I do," Mary hesitated. "But—"

"Because that sort of thing's all right for the girls that are born to it and used to it, but it's not all right for a girl like you," Mr. Hammond submitted. "Well enough to try it for a while, to see what it's like, or—or to get data, or whatever the reason may have been that made you try it; but—oh, no, you're not fitted for that sort of thing!"

"Why not?"

"Oh, because you're altogether too fine and delicate and beautiful and high-bred ever to fit into that sort of atmosphere! When you were in it, you looked so frightfully out of place that—well, I don't know that I meant to say all that, Miss Allers, even if it is the truth. What I meant was—I say, you're not bothered with the idea of wanting to be one of the smart people, are you?"

"Possibly. I—"

"Don't be!" said Mr. Hammond. "That sort of thing's well enough in its way, and sometimes it takes a long while to get enough of it, but you *can* get enough. I—I knew a fellow once with a lot of money who tried it out to the limit, and he—ah—did!" he concluded rather enigmatically. He rose briskly. "You'll have to excuse me for sitting down and talking to you like this, but I was so surprised to see you I couldn't help it."

"Well? Why not sit down again and talk a little longer?" Mary suggested.

"No, I guess I'd better get on my job now," the honest fellow replied firmly. "Do you live here now?"

"I'm just visiting."

Quite in the approved workman fashion, Mr. Hammond bobbed his head.

"Yes, miss—and please excuse my asking. I suppose I haven't any right to say anything like this, but—but I'm mighty glad to have seen you again, and I hope we may meet again, some time."

"Yes, I—hope so, too," said Mary's rather small voice.

Another bob, and Mr. Hammond was striding up the drive.

Mary's gaze—a very deep and thoughtful one—remained fixed upon his broad back as it receded; and after it had vanished around the curve in the drive, her gaze remained fixed upon the spot where it had been. Mary's lovely eyes were round, too, and her breathing had grown quite rapid. She was not entirely sure, but from certain sensations within her gentle bosom, she suspected that she was about to find herself at last!

Because *there* was a man!

Oh, no, no, no! She wasn't particularly interested in the individual himself, but she was passionately interested in what he represented. There was not a Parks or a Dinsmore, but a *man*—and he came, not from the Parks and Dinsmore section of society, but of her own people.

Once upon a time she had loathed that stratum, had fancied everything within it poor and cheap and unworthy. Why? Well, wholly and solely because there had been nothing within her vision with which to draw comparisons. Now, in the clearest and sharpest way, the young Hammond person had presented himself—and had vanished again, in all probability, out of her life, since his purpose had been served—and at last Mary understood!

Hammond, of course, was a worker of a superior type. He had read, and had done his own thinking—his speech betrayed that. There was an instinctive refinement about him that many of his fellows lacked; but even the coarsest of them, as they appeared to Mary just now, was worth ten thousand Dinsmores.

"Good morning, Mary," said Mr. Penning, pausing.

"Oh!" gasped Mary.

"I startled you? Pardon me."

"I—I hadn't expected you, or any one else, to be about so early," said Mary.

The attorney sighed.

"Oh, I'm like the fireman and the policeman, always on duty," he said. "Mr. Valmer wanted me over here early, and I'm here. We seem very thoughtful this morning!"

"We are," said Mary. "Mr. Penning, you—you've lived a lot and seen a lot, haven't you?"

"I've seen a good deal, without doing very much living. Why?"

"Well—don't misunderstand me, please, but—are all the people in—in this Valmer class as lazy and unprincipled as the few I have met?"

"That's quite a direct way of putting it, Mary!" the attorney chuckled. "Still, I know what you mean, of course, and—yes, a lot of 'em are, I suppose. Not all, by any means, but a good many. You don't approve of them?"

"Do you?"

"I'm not paid to have opinions of just that character."

"But Mr. Valmer—"

"Oh, Valmer himself's very much all right, Mary," Mr. Penning said hastily. "All old-fashioned ideals and concepts, and so on. Queer chap in some ways—all up in the air with enthusiasm one moment and off in one of his black rages the next; but we all have our queer little kinks, you know, and his are harmless. Fundamentally, Valmer's the soundest individual you ever met!"

"I know it—he's really good, and that's why I'd—"

She paused. Mr. Penning, whose fading eyes saw much, pricked up his ears interestedly.

"Why you'd what, Mary?"

"Well, why I'd hate to disappoint him by not becoming one of them, if that's what he wished to make me."

"Why, I fancied that you had already become—"

"I haven't!" Mary interrupted fiercely.

"And I thank Heaven that I haven't! Mrs. Fairson and her friends were wonderful, but if these people really are what I thought I wanted to be, I was wrong, and—I want to go back!"

"My child!"

"You know Mr. Valmer better than I. Would he let me do that?"

"Willingly?"

"Of course!"

"He would not! He—" began Mr. Penning, and there his voice trailed off to nothing at all.

No sheet of white paper could have been any more blank than was the lawyer's countenance just then, but his capable brain clicked ahead at the liveliest speed.

For one thing, he flattered himself that he could tell when a woman's mind was fully made up to a given course of action—and Mary's mind was visibly in that condition. For another, Mr. Valmer, yesterday afternoon, had gone quite mad on his character foundation scheme, pacing the library and outlining to Penning the most impossible plans, bound to involve money in sums which caused the attorney's heart to skip several beats. Nor would there be any simple way of giving Stephen pause while day by day he could look upon this lovely girl, the perfect example of what could be done with extremely raw material.

But should Mary elect to remove her charming self—Mr. Penning cleared his throat and the upward roll of his eyes was almost pious.

"My dear," said he, "I fear that you fail to realize my rather peculiar position here. You're seeking advice?"

"Certainly."

"It would be simply impossible for me to advise you in a matter of this kind, Mary."

"Yes, but—"

"And may I say another thing? This little conversation, so far as I am concerned, never took place. I am not entirely cowardly, but, in dealing with Mr. Valmer, there are some things in which I do not care to be involved. I know how much store he has set on this little experiment with you."

"That's just it!" Mary said, almost bitterly. "After all the money that he has spent—"

"Pshaw! The money!" interrupted Mr. Penning. "That's of no consequence, one way or the other—to Mr. Valmer, I mean to say. His fortune is growing in a fashion that's almost outrageous, and a matter of twenty or thirty thousand dollars is of very little moment."

"Is that truly and literally so?" Mary asked eagerly.

"That, my dear young lady," said the lawyer, growing still more bland and kind-

ly, "is a fragment of information which you may regard as confidential, if you choose, and incontestably true."

"Then does anything else *really* matter, Mr. Penning?"

The attorney, avoiding her eyes, twitched down his coat collar and turned toward the house.

"My dear Mary, we have our personal problems—all of us. We must solve them for ourselves as seems best," he concluded helpfully. "In my own case, I have found that heart and head, given free rein to work together, almost invariably produce the right answer. Good morning!"

He moved away with his elderly shuffle—a gait very different from the Hammond stride; and after him, too, Mary stared.

Mr. Penning was whistling softly, but quite audibly on the still morning air. That was queer. One wouldn't have thought of Mr. Penning as a whistler; but he was a good old soul, wasn't he?

"Heart and head, given free rein—"

Mary's hands clasped, and her pretty lips pursed. For a long, long time she sat upon the stone bench, with her eyes on the drive, while cars whizzed by on the State road outside the gates, and people laughed, and an occasional delivery wagon passed to the measure of thudding hoofs, and the sun rose higher and higher and higher.

When at last she got up, she was another Mary. Decision was writ large upon her, but there was caution, too. Turning from the drive to one of the little paths, she walked swiftly toward the Valmer mansion—not toward the front entrance, but straight for the pretty little side door hidden by the rose arbor.

### XIII

TIME had been when Mr. Penning vastly enjoyed an hour with Stephen and his favorite nephew, John Valmer.

Similar in so many things—of which a terrific and not very logical stubbornness was emphatically one—the two Valmers had been close chums for years. Dry wit had had a habit of sparkling through such hours, and there had been something very pleasing and comfortable in watching the pair together, John so nicely filling the gap created by the nonappearance of any son in Stephen's family.

But Penning enjoyed those hours no longer. They had grown few and far between, occurring mostly when some detail

of John's considerable estate was to be looked after, and they had been entirely spoiled by John's desertion to a lower layer of humanity.

This little eccentricity Stephen, himself sufficiently eccentric, had chosen never quite to forgive. As for John, the young man was holding more and more stiffly aloof from his uncle. Mr. Penning was accustomed to heave a sigh of relief when the business had been concluded, John had returned to his ridiculous factory, and Mr. Valmer, more often than otherwise, had developed a fit of ill temper that was likely to last for days.

This morning's session was an exception to the general rule, however. John, as it presently dawned upon Mr. Penning, was not nearly so aloof as usual. Stephen, to be sure, remained tart in the extreme, grunting at his nephew, grunting at Penning as he ordered him to read this or that bit aloud, grunting as he indicated the lines on which John must sign his name; but a remarkable change had come over John since their last gathering.

He had grinned when he entered the den, just as he used to grin in the dear old days. He had pulled himself up and scowled at Stephen's unenthusiastic greeting, to be sure; but within five minutes Penning had caught the young man grinning again, as he read through a certain document. Yes, and he was humming to himself, too, Mr. Penning noted with wonder. He hadn't heard John Valmer hum for three full years! More than this, John attempted a joke; and when it met with Stephen's vinegar grunt and dropped lifeless, he only chuckled. Presently he essayed another joke, and at this one Stephen involuntarily gave vent to a sound almost resembling a chuckle.

John, in fine, was in high good humor this beautiful morning, and he really seemed to be trying to infect Stephen. Several times Mr. Penning meditatively scratched his ear with the end of his fountain pen, and grew almost gay. The mellow atmosphere was dissipated, however, by Stephen's final surly command:

"Take 'em downstairs in the library and fix 'em up, Penning!"

"Er—very well," sighed the attorney, and rose and fled.

"By, John!" Stephen added briefly, as he picked up a book.

"Throwing me out, uncle?"



"What's that?"

"Am I to go at once?" John grinned.

"By all means!" snapped Mr. Valmer. "Don't let me keep you from your damned steam engine, or whatever it is that you work at!"

"It's a press—and it's not likely to miss me much for an hour or two. Don't have to get back and feed it, you know."

"Huh?" said his uncle, and peered at him.

John Valmer crossed his legs and smiled serenely.

"I'd really like to stay and chat a while, if you don't mind," he said.

Stephen Valmer peered again and laid aside his book.

"What the devil's the matter with you, John?" he demanded. "You look almost natural."

"Is that a compliment or just a mean one?"

"Put a respectable suit of clothes on you, and you *would* look natural!" old Mr. Valmer mused aloud. "Where'd you buy that trash you're wearing?"

"Down at Finkelberg's, where a lot of our men do their trading," John said cheerfully. "It isn't trash, by the way. This suit cost thirty-five dollars, earned money. They run as low as twelve in Finky's place."

"Do they?" Stephen sneered. "Doubtless I'm unable to grasp the beauties of that one. With your wealth, and the big things you might be doing—"

"Uncle!" John cried, and held up a restraining hand.

"What?"

"Suppose we don't get into another argument on that question just now," said young Mr. Valmer. He rose impulsively and crossed to his uncle's chair. There, just as he had been wont to do as a half grown boy, he perched on the wide arm and laid a hand on Stephen's shoulder, causing that gentleman to stare up somewhat blankly. "It's not worth it, you know."

"You have always considered that my opinions were worth flouting!"

"Well, uncle, sometimes a man does make a mistake, doesn't he?" John said, ever so gently. "And if he's the kind who naturally takes a good while to reason anything out, perhaps he doesn't see his mistake at once; but, unless he happens to be a thoroughgoing jackass, when he does see it he admits it, eh?"

"Why — what — what—" Mr. Valmer gasped.

"Exactly," said his nephew. "I was wrong!"

"You're really sick of your confounded proletariat?"

"Oh, not just that. They're a good lot, uncle—a mighty good lot, most of them. I've enjoyed working down there much more than you'd ever believe. Only, these last few weeks particularly—I don't know."

"Johnny, are you coming back home here to live?" Stephen demanded.

John patted the shoulder affectionately.

"Well, I thought that perhaps, if you'd let me, I might look in on the old room and see if it still seemed able to hold me. It's high time I took a vacation, anyway. I haven't missed a full day in three years!"

"You—you want to come home for good—to quit your fool job and—and—" Mr. Valmer gurgled joyously, and came bodily out of his chair.

"Uncle," said John, with a light sigh, "I shouldn't be a darned bit surprised if that's just what I did want to do!"

"Well, the Lord be praised!" Stephen vociferated. He caught his nephew's big hand and wrung it and wrung it again, and, in fact, kept on wringing it. "Reason's climbed back on her throne, and the boy's sane again! Why, that's the finest thing that has happened since—John! What was it?"

"What was what?"

"The blessed thing that brought you to your senses!"

John shrugged his shoulders, and his smile was almost as dreamy and languid as that of Mr. Dinsmore.

"Why, nothing specific, I think, uncle. Sometimes a notion just peters out of its own accord, doesn't it?"

"And sometimes it takes a mighty long time, because a man's too mulish to admit the truth, even to himself!"

"Likely enough," John grinned, and it was plain that this morning he could not be offended.

"But so long as it did happen—John, I can't tell you how glad I am!"

"Well, I'm glad you're glad, uncle. I'm a bit glad myself, I think," the nephew chuckled. "No guests in my room, are there, by the way?"

"Nobody has occupied it since you lost your balance."

"Then I think I'll get in there and see

how the old things look—the old togs, too. They'll be a trifle out of date, won't they?"

"I'll send for Ferguson, John—have him here in two hours. He'll have some respectable things on you in two days, if I insist, and—"

"Oh, it's not as urgent as all that," John laughed. "I say, don't mention it to the girls, will you—my being back?"

"Er—"

"I want to give 'em a little surprise at lunch, you know. I'll get Barton to brush me off some things, and I'll tell him to lay the extra place and say nothing. I'll see that I happen in a bit late, after they're settled down, and—ha, ha, ha!" laughed the remarkable John.

Once more their hands met and clasped, hard and heartily. John sauntered away, humming blithely to himself. Mr. Valmer plumped back into his chair and gayly bit the end from a fresh cigar, without ever looking around for the clipper. He hummed a little, too, and muttered pleasantly to himself. His eyes shone happiness.

Out in the corridor John chuckled merrily, and sought the door of his good old room. Fresh and crisp and airy Mrs. Dwight had kept it, under Stephen's orders. Silently, cheerily, it greeted its tenant and made him welcome.

Young Mr. Valmer rang for the butler—and Barton found him sprawled in his one-time favorite chair, grinning.

"Lo, Barton!" said John, with a wave of the hand. "Back, you see!"

"To—to stay a while, Mr. John?"

"A good long while, I think, Barton!"

The butler's rather gloomy countenance expanded in a smile.

"Well, that's very good news, sir!" he cried.

"Thanks. May I ask you to do a little valeting for me?"

"Anything in the world that I'm able to do, sir!"

"Once upon a time, ages ago, I used to own a fuzzy gray sports suit, Barton—a trifle gay, but comfortable, and calculated to display the perfect athletic figure—mine!" young Mr. Valmer pursued airily. "I wonder if that's still about the place!"

"It's in your closet, sir, all pressed and covered up," the butler reported, and hurried in that direction. "I attended to all your clothes, sir, when Mr. Valmer said you wasn't going to send for 'em, a long time ago. This one, Mr. John?"

"That's the one! Any shoes around to go with it?"

"Right here, sir."

"Fine! Now, will you look me up a respectable shirt and the rest of the stuff?"

His bright smile persisting, the butler busied himself, while young Mr. Valmer lolled back and alternated between watching Barton and glancing from the window at the Scarford landscape, rich with the pale, tender green of early spring. He yawned, indicating complete indifference, as he began:

"How are things in general around the old place, Barton?"

"Why, very much the same as usual, sir."

"Lots of entertaining, I suppose?"

"Not a great deal, Mr. John."

John stretched.

"Mrs. Fayles always managed to have some one hanging about," he mused. "Hasn't she anybody at all these days?"

"Mrs. Fayles—why—um—" The butler hesitated. "There's only one guest in the house at present, sir—Miss Allers."

"Friend of Mrs. Fayles?"

"I—don't think so, sir."

"Oh, one of Mrs. Dinsmore's crowd, then?" John reflected, but the butler, occupied with shoes, failed to answer. "Allers? I don't seem to remember any one named Allers."

"A young lady, sir."

"The Virginia Allerses, I suppose?"

"I couldn't say, Mr. John."

"Although there was a family of that name in Rhode Island, wasn't there?"

"I couldn't say that, either, Mr. John."

"What's the matter, Barton—losing your curiosity as you get older?"

"I beg pardon, sir?"

"You used to have the pedigree of every one who ever entered the house, unless my memory's playing tricks."

"Well, you—if you'll excuse my saying it, Mr. John," said Barton, with a flustered little smile, "you was never very inquisitive about 'em, or much interested, sir."

"Um—that's probably true enough, too," John reflected, with a grin. "I feel interested in everything now, though—it's so infernally good to get back! This Miss—Allers, was it?—is just here for a day or two, and then we'll have the old home to ourselves, eh?"

"Well, I—I don't know as to that, either. I think—that is, it seems as if

somebody said, Mr. John—that the young lady was remaining quite a time.”

John gazed upon the butler's broad back, and smiled. Then, as Barton turned around, the young man yawned again.

“Quite a while, eh? Oh, well—can't be helped, I suppose. Is she—”

The butler straightened up with a determination which John failed to note, and which he would have failed to understand, had he noted it.

“Will that be all, Mr. John, or shall I assist you to dress?” he interrupted.

“Eh? In a hurry?”

“There's a great deal to be done to-day, sir, begging pardon. Your shirt's fixed and your shoes, Mr. John. Will you bathe, too?”

John's smiling eyes directed themselves toward the door of his little bathroom, and he nodded.

“Great, big, white, splashy tub, and real towels an inch thick!” he mused aloud. “Yes, I think I will, just for the fun of the thing. You skip along, Barton. I'll attend to that, and—oh, by the way! Just forget that I'm here, will you? Want to surprise the girls at luncheon, you know. Lay the extra place, and say nothing,” concluded young Mr. Valmer, and just caught himself as he was about to slap the swiftly departing shoulder of his uncle's butler.

Following this, John turned on the hot water and devoted a brief space to pleasant meditation.

His uncle was really pleased with his rather suddenly reached decision to return, wasn't he? A good old chap, his uncle—the best that ever lived. Odd in some ways, given to fits of temper, wherein he was all but impossible, and enough to drive a dozen nephews from the house; but a good old chap, all the same, Uncle Steve!

Barton seemed to be getting old; natural enough, of course, but he didn't look any older. It was mental, not physical. Why, three years ago, when any uninteresting nonentity was staying at the house, the butler had cornered one, on the slightest provocation, to relate how the James Brown branch of the family had married into the Cassings of Baltimore, while the William Brown element was allied with the Filman family of Portsmouth, the second son of James having married the eldest daughter of Pottswood Cassling, while the eldest daughter of William, by his first wife—and all that sort of silly rot. And yet upon this,

the first occasion of John's asking a question about a guest, Barton's spring of information had gone dry.

Towels! Say! They *were* towels, were they not? No towel of that character had touched John's skin in three years!

Later, having arrayed himself with a care quite foreign to any of his dressing in the same three years, young Mr. Valmer rolled his big chair over to the open window, found his supply of cigarettes—which were the cheapest variety, and would have to be replaced this afternoon with a brand a bit more fitting—disposed his well shod feet upon a stool, and sighed luxuriously. One more hour, and luncheon would be served! John chuckled and reached for the matches.

Ina's familiar voice in the corridor roused him at last. Ina was going down now, and, unless habits had changed, Edith, if at home, would follow in another five or ten minutes. Oh, yes, there was the voice of Edith's more or less esteemed consort now, and it hadn't changed at all. Well, let 'em all get down and reach the stage of asking the reason for the empty extra chair!

John left off his chuckling and laughed outright, long and almost foolishly. Rarely in recent years had he grown playful, but the mood was upon him now. The family, doubtless, would exclaim at the sight of him; but watching Mary Allers's expression was going to be rather well worth while!

In all probability, since a very new friend would hardly be making an extended visit, she had heard of the Valmer nephew. Almost certainly, however, she knew nothing of his shameful dereliction, for that, as John chanced to know, was a family skeleton quite carefully guarded; but she did know Jim Hammond, the honest working-man. When Jim Hammond loitered into the Valmer dining room and took his place, perhaps even beside her—John laughed again!

If he chose to linger here much longer with his idiotic giggling, luncheon would be over and the point of his joke a trifle dulled. Young Mr. Valmer arose, examined himself in the mirror, and then sauntered down the stairway.

They were already seated. John subdued his grin and entered, just as he had entered in the old days, just as if he had never missed one of them—entered and looked around and failed to grin as he

had intended. Mr. Dinsmore, glancing up, said:

"Ha! How-de-do, Jack?"

"Hello, Wells!" young Mr. Valmer replied, rather absently. "Hello, Ina!"

Ina nodded.

"Stopping over for luncheon, Johnny? That's nice," she observed, without any hysterical enthusiasm.

Her elder sister also nodded, and went on with something she had been saying to her husband.

"I'm home for good," John stated.

"Oh, that's even nicer!" said Ina. "Did they—er—fire you, Jack?"

"No, I—I left of my own accord."

Young Mr. Valmer grinned faintly, as he settled in his place and glanced at the empty chair beside him. "Somebody missing from the family circle?"

Stephen was looking directly at his younger daughter.

"Oh, yes, we have a guest—Mary Allers," she said.

"Do I know her?" John Valmer queried innocently.

"Not yet. You will presently," Ina said.

"And when you do, John, you'll know an exceptionally fine young woman!" Stephen added, with some emphasis.

"She must be that, sir, if you commend her," said John. "I remember that you failed to approve of most—"

"Father hasn't changed any," Edith remarked. "Mary's the lucky exception."

And now they were talking about some unimportant golf matter again—or the sisters and Dinsmore were, at all events. As Barton removed dishes and put on other dishes, and the meal approached its end,

*(To be continued in the November number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)*

Stephen's glance strayed repeatedly toward the empty chair, until—

"Where is Mary?" he inquired, suddenly and with emphasis.

Only silence greeted him.

"Not ill, is she?"

"She's not in her room, father," Ina answered. "The door was open when I came down."

"Oh, she's probably galloping along forty or fifty miles from here," Mr. Dinsmore submitted. "Lost all track of time, no doubt. Mary's strong for the horseback stuff."

"She can't have taken a tumble, can she?" Edith asked sharply.

"Well, that's a pleasant possibility," Stephen said. "No, hardly. Somebody'd have telephoned in, if anything of that kind had happened. Barton, did Miss Allers ride this morning?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

"She's not at home?"

"I haven't seen her, sir."

"Well, find out from the stable, Barton. If she isn't riding, find Miss Allers and say that luncheon has been served for some time."

The meal went on, quite as if nothing disturbing was afoot, quite as if no empty chair yawned at the younger Mr. Valmer's elbow. The meal, in fact, had reached its end before Barton reappeared.

"Miss Allers didn't ride, sir, and she's not in the house," he reported.

Stephen peered sharply at him.

"Look around the grounds, Barton."

"I've had Jenkins do that, sir," the butler responded. "Miss Allers isn't in the grounds, either, Mr. Valmer."

### POPPIES OF OBLIVION

My heart is a poppy-thick garden—

Nothing but graves, nothing but graves;

I plant there the violets of pardon,

The balms of regret, and there waves

Oblivion of grasses that sigh

That love can but die.

Oh, headstones of names that did love me,

Of names once alive in the light!

Till the nettles shall prosper above me

I shall say them alone in the night;

Remembrance of each I shall keep,

Till I, too, must sleep.

*Oliver C. Moore*



# Out of the Woods

THE STORY OF AN ARTLESS GIRL, A HUNGRY WOLF, AND  
A WONDERFUL GRANDMOTHER

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

WHEN you learn that this story begins with the heroine setting off through the woods to visit her grandmother, who was ill, you may guess that it is the familiar tale of *Little Red Riding Hood*. I must admit that that is what it is, and I warn you that you may count upon a very artless little heroine and a wolf of insinuating manners and glib tongue; but *this* grandmother will not be eaten up.

Nor did Ethel carry a basket containing a little pat of butter and a cake. She had, instead, a large and luxurious box of candied fruit under her arm; and instead of singing through the woods, she wore a sulky and miserable expression. Unfortunately red hoods are not in vogue, for such a thing would have been notably becoming to her little gypsy face. However, she was young enough and lovely enough to look well in anything, even a sulky expression.

She was not without some excuse for her discontented air. Ethel was one of those unfortunate little bones of contention so often to be found in divided families, and she had been so much disputed over and argued about, and so rarely consulted or even questioned, that she had grown to think of herself as a helpless pawn in an incomprehensible game, where she could never win anything.

The disputes had begun long before she was born. Her father's family had that pride of newly acquired wealth beside which pride of ancestry shrinks to nothing. Indeed, to spring from splendid ancestors may often make one feel a little humble, but to feel that one is vastly more important than any of one's forbears makes for arrogance.

The Taylors had objected very much to the marriage of their only son. Even when

the marriage was made, and there was no earthly use in objecting, they kept on, in a very unpleasant way. All the misfortunes which the young man brought upon his wife and child by his recklessness and folly only increased their anger against the victims; and when he died, they all came forward with helpful suggestions as to what he should have done when he was alive.

Ethel had been a small girl of nine then, and not yet looked upon as guilty; but when she refused to leave her mother and take advantage of the offers made by several of the Taylors, she lost their sympathy. Her mother, with criminal selfishness, hadn't made the least attempt to persuade her child to leave her. On the contrary, she had gone back to her own people, and had lived with them in quiet contentment.

It was to these people of hers that the Taylors so strongly objected. She herself was a quiet and inoffensive creature who gave little trouble, but her parents were Italians, and poor, and not ashamed of either of the two things.

Dr. Mazetti had been professor of romance languages in a small Western college, but he had become so absorbed in the enormous commentary upon Dante which he was writing that he found his teaching very much in the way; so he gave up his chair. Mrs. Taylor, the paternal grandmother, had spoken about this.

"Of course," she had said, not very pleasantly, "it's a good thing to have faith in your husband's work; but suppose it's not a financial success?"

"We don't expect it to be," replied Mrs. Mazetti, in her excellent English. "Such work as that is not undertaken for money."

"Do you mean to say that you'll permit your husband to give up his—" began Mrs. Taylor, but the other interrupted her.

"A man does not ask the permission of others to do what he thinks best," she said quietly. "I should be ashamed of myself if I were even to suggest that he should sacrifice his life's work on my account."

"What about yourself? Aren't you sacrificing—"

"I sacrifice nothing," said Mrs. Mazetti. "I am very, very happy and proud."

And so she was, and so was her only child until she married young Taylor; and so she was again when she came home with the little Ethel, to live with those simple, gentle people once more. Not for long, however, for she died some two years later.

Then the arguments and disputes began again, and this time the Taylors won. Children of eleven are pitifully easy to bribe, and while Ethel was still dazed and stricken after the loss of her mother, all these relations competed for her favor. She was petted and pampered as she had never been before in her life.

It is regrettable to admit that she liked all this, liked the toys and the pretty clothes and the indulgence better than the benign and quiet régime of her grandfather Mazetti, who believed that children should be literally "brought up" to the level of the wiser and more experienced adults about them, instead of bringing a whole household down to childish standards. He was always very patient and gentle, but he was too fond of talking about Dante, and of relating anecdotes about an Italian poet who insisted upon being tied into his chair, so that he couldn't run away from his studies.

Moreover, old Dr. Mazetti had no money to spend upon toys and clothes. The Taylors took no interest in Dante or any other poet, but they took Ethel to the circus; so she said she wanted to live with Aunt Amy, her father's sister.

She wasn't aware, at the time, how terribly she had hurt the Mazettis. They said very little. Indeed, they discussed it in private, and decided that it was their duty to say very little. Aunt Amy could give Ethel material benefits which they could not give; and if the child preferred that sort of thing, it was, after all, neither unnatural nor unexpected.

"Each must find his own," said Dr. Mazetti. "What is joy for one is a burden for another."

So they let her go, and they did it beautifully, without saddening her little heart

with reproaches or tears. She came back to visit them once a month or so, but somehow, in her new existence, this quiet old couple had begun to seem very foreign, very unreal.

She was abroad with her aunt when Dr. Mazetti died. Though she grieved for him honestly, she was too young and too busy to nourish any sorrow long.

## II

WHEN Ethel Taylor came home, at nineteen, her grandmother seemed like a little ghost from the past, utterly unconnected with her present life. She still went to visit the old lady, and sat in the familiar room in her little cottage, where the bronze bust of Dante appeared to impose a dignified calm; but these visits were nothing but interludes to real life, and real life, just now, was a miserable thing.

The trouble was that Aunt Amy kept on being Aunt Amy, while the childish Ethel and the nineteen-year-old one were entirely different persons. Aunt Amy wanted her to come out, and to be a nice, happy débutante like other girls; but something in Ethel's blood rebelled against that. She called it a "modern spirit," and never realized that instead of being modern, it was the old Mazetti strain, come down to her from people who for generations had not lived by bread alone.

She told her aunt that she wanted to be a singer.

"That's a charming accomplishment," said Aunt Amy affably.

"I mean I want really to study—for years and years!"

"Certainly, dear, if you can find the time."

"Time!" said Ethel. "What else do I ever do but waste time?"

"Naturally you can't neglect your social duties—"

"Duties!"

"Please don't repeat my words in that odd way," said Aunt Amy, a little hurt. "If you want to study singing, there's no reason why you shouldn't, so long as you're not excessive about it."

"But I want to be excessive! I want to give all my time to it! I want to be a professional singer!"

Aunt Amy laughed, not in order to be irritating, but because she really thought it was funny. Not being a woman of much penetration, she told some of her friends

about that absurd little Ethel's fantastic idea.

As a result, the girl was teased about it. Ethel couldn't endure being teased. She had that queer lack of self-confidence, combined with tremendous resolution and a little vanity, that belong to young artists, and she felt that she was absurd, although she really knew that she wasn't. She was ashamed to practice now, and at the same time she exulted in her clear, strong, flexible voice. When she was asked to sing, she refused; yet sometimes, when she knew there were people in the drawing-room, she would go up the stairs or through the hall, singing her loudest and sweetest, half terrified, half delighted, at the glorious flood of melody that rose from her heart.

She didn't want anything else. She couldn't and wouldn't be bothered with "social duties." She wanted to work hard, all day and every day, until she was mistress of this great gift of hers, until she could sing in reality as she did in imagination. She had fits of black depression, when the sounds that came from her throat seemed a mockery of what she intended. At other moments she was in wild spirits, because she was sure she had made a little progress.

Her changing humors were so marked that Aunt Amy was gravely perturbed. She felt that Ethel was becoming "eccentric," which was the worst thing any one could be, and she attributed it all to this annoying obsession with singing. In all good faith, she did what she thought best for the girl—she stopped her lessons.

Ethel wept and stormed and entreated and argued until she was almost ill, but without moving Aunt Amy.

"No!" that lady said firmly. "If you'll put all that nonsense out of your head, and lead a normal, sensible life like other girls, I'll let you take up singing again in a year."

She hoped and believed that within a year's time such a pretty and delightful girl would surely find something better to think about.

Ethel was helpless. She was exquisitely dressed, and she lived in great comfort and luxury, but she hadn't a penny of her own to pay for lessons.

Artists, however—even young and undeveloped ones—are very hard to deal with, because they will not give up and be sensible. Instead of resigning herself to doing without what she wanted, Ethel did nothing

but think how she could get at least a part of it. Being nineteen, and rash, and terribly in earnest, she was dallying with a singularly unsuitable idea.

### III

"HELLO, Lad!" she said, not at all surprised, and apparently not very much pleased, at the sudden appearance of a young man on that quiet path through the woods.

"Hello, Ethel!" he returned, and fell into step beside her.

She didn't trouble to glance at her companion. She knew exactly how he looked, anyhow. He was slender and supple and dark, and handsome in his way—which was not her way.

There were times when the sleekness of his hair and the brightness of his smile and the extreme fastidiousness of his clothes exasperated her. There were other times when his talk about music made her see in him the one sympathetic, understanding person on earth. He had learned to read the signs, and to tell which sort of time it was; and he fancied that this was a favorable moment.

"Have you been thinking—" he began softly.

"Naturally," said she. "I suppose every one does, once in a while."

Young Ladislaw Metz was not easily discouraged. He, too, was an artist.

"Do you mind my walking with you, Ethel?" he asked patiently. "I came all the way out from the city on the chance of meeting you here, because I had something special to tell you."

She thought she knew what he meant, and frowned; but when he began to speak, the frown vanished, and she sat down on the grass to listen.

Old Mrs. Mazetti was waiting and waiting in her chair by the window. All the bright spring afternoon had passed. The sky was blue no more, but faint and mournful as the sun went down. Outside, the light lingered, but in the room it was dark—very dark, very quiet. Ethel had written to say that she would come early, and for hours the old lady had been watching the road along which her granddaughter must come. It always made her uneasy to think of a girl as young and pretty as Ethel traveling alone.

This was one of the very few ideas that

Aunt Amy shared with Mrs. Mazetti. Aunt Amy wanted Ethel to go properly in a motor car, but her niece was so obstinately set on going by train that she had yielded. After all, it was such a trifling matter—an hour's journey to a suburb, to visit a grandmother. The good lady never so much as imagined the existence of Ladislav Metz, or any one like him.

But old Mrs. Mazetti did. Not that she knew anything of this particular young man, but she had had opportunity, in her long life, to observe that in such cases there generally was a young man. When Ethel began taking more and more time between the station and the house, the old lady grew more and more sure, and more distressed.

She said nothing, however, because her grandchild showed no disposition to confide in her, and she knew that more harm than good would result from asking questions. She couldn't get near to Ethel. She had tried time after time, with all her quiet subtlety, to bring about a greater intimacy, to show how steadfast and profound was her sympathy; but Ethel never saw.

In fact, Ethel didn't know that she needed sympathy. She thought that all she wanted was to be let alone. Without in the least meaning to be unkind, she ignored the invaluable love that would so greatly have helped her.

For the third time the servant came in to light the lamp, and this time Mrs. Mazetti permitted it. She had given up expecting Ethel for that day.

"She has forgotten," she thought.

In spite of her bitter disappointment, she could still smile a little over the girl's careless youth. The sun had vanished now, and a strange yellow twilight lay over the earth like a sulphurous mist. It was a melancholy hour. The brightness of the little room made the outside world more forlorn and dim by contrast.

Mrs. Mazetti was about to turn away from the window with a sigh, when she caught sight of Ethel hurrying along the road—with a young man. The girl's companion left her when they were still some distance from the house. If the old lady hadn't had remarkably sharp eyes, she would never have seen him.

Ethel came in alone.

"Grandmother!" she said. "I'm awfully ashamed of myself for being so late!"

She really was ashamed and sorry, but

it was not her nature to invent excuses, and she had no intention of explaining. Mrs. Mazetti saw all this perfectly, and did not fail to note something defiant in her grandchild's expression. Nevertheless, she meant to come to the point this time.

"You were with a friend?" she asked mildly.

"Yes, grandmother."

"Your Aunt Amy knows this friend?"

Ethel tried to imitate that tranquil, affectionate tone.

"No, grandmother, she doesn't. He's just a boy I met at the studio where I used to take singing lessons."

"And you think she would not care for him?"

"I know she wouldn't," Ethel answered candidly. "I don't care for him so very much myself; but we're interested in the same things, and nobody else is."

"In music?"

"Yes. He's—" Ethel began, but she stopped.

What was the use of going on, and being told again how absurd she was? Mrs. Mazetti was silent, too, but not because she felt discouraged. She was thinking, trying to understand.

"You are still always thinking of the singing?" she asked softly.

Ethel's face flushed, and her young mouth set in a harsh line.

"I'm not going to listen to any more lectures," she thought. "No one understands. No one ever will!"

"This young man is a musician?" her grandmother asked.

"Yes, in a way," said Ethel. "Isn't the country pretty at this time of the year, grandmother?"

The old lady looked out of the window at the rapidly darkening sky, against which the trees stood out as black as ink. It seemed to her not at all pretty now, but vast and terrible.

"My little Ethel!" she thought. "My little bird, who longs to sing! What is this going on now, poor foolish little one? What am I to do?"

She missed her husband acutely. She missed him always, but more than ever at this instant. Ethel would have listened to him, for every one did. Quiet and tranquil as he was, there had been an air of authority about him that she had never seen disregarded.

Ethel was very still. The lamp threw a



clear light on her warm, vivid young face, downcast and plainly unhappy.

"If I spoke to your Aunt Amy about those lessons?" suggested the old lady.

"It wouldn't do the least bit of good, grandmother. I've said everything there is to be said; and—anyhow, I don't care now."

"Why not, Ethel? Why not now?"

"Oh, I don't know!" Ethel replied airily. "Let's not talk about it, grandmother. I've brought some candied fruit. You like that, don't you?"

The old lady untied the flamboyant package with fingers that were not very steady. While she was doing so, the clock struck six.

"I'll have to go," said Ethel quickly. "I'm sorry I came so late and had such a tiny visit, grandmother, but—"

"Wait, my little Ethel. Gianetta will order a taxi."

"Oh, no, thanks!" said Ethel. "I like the walk."

"Not now, in the dark, my dear."

"I don't mind the dark. It's really not at all late. I'll—"

"No!" said the old lady with unexpected firmness. "There must be a taxi, and Gianetta will go with you to the train."

Ethel answered politely, but with equal firmness, that she didn't want that.

"Come here, my little Ethel!" said her grandmother. When the girl stood before her, she took both of her hands. "This friend—this young man—is waiting for you?"

Ethel flushed, but she answered with the fine honesty that had been hers all her life.

"Yes!" she said, in just the sturdy, defiant tone she used to confess a piece of childish mischief years and years ago.

"You see me here," said Mrs. Mazetti, "unable even to rise from my chair. I could do nothing to stop you, if I wished. I do not wish, because I trust you; only I ask you to tell me a little."

Ethel was more moved than she wished to be. She bent to kiss the soft white hair.

"I'd rather not, please!" she said.

"If you will remember, my little Ethel, that your mother always came to me, always told me what troubled her! I am very old. I have learned very much, seen very much. I could help you."

"But you wouldn't, grandmother. You wouldn't like my—plan."

"Then perhaps I could make a better one."

Mrs. Mazetti felt the girl's warm hands tremble, and saw her lip quiver. She waited, terribly anxious.

"You see," said Ethel, "all I care about is being able to sing. Nobody believes that. No one understands except Ladislav!"

"That is the young man?"

"Yes—Ladislav Metz," said Ethel, a little impatient at this interest in the least important part of her story. "He knows what it means to me."

"What is he? He sings?"

"He's a barytone. He's going to be a wonderful singer some day."

"But now? What is he now?"

"Well, you see, he's poor, and he can't afford to go on studying just now. So—I don't like to tell you, because you'll think he's not really a musician—he's on the stage."

"Ah!" said the old lady, with perfect composure. "The theater? An operetta?"

"Well, no—it's vaudeville. He's been singing awful, cheap, popular songs, just to keep himself alive. Now he wants a partner for a better sort of turn—an act, you know. We should sing—"

"We?"

"He's going to give me a chance," said Ethel quietly. The old lady was silent for a moment.

"I should like to hear about it," she told the girl at last, in a voice that touched Ethel profoundly—a voice so determined to sound cheerful and sympathetic.

"I can't tell you, grandmother," she said gently; "because you'd think it was your duty to tell Aunt Amy, and she'd try to stop me. I don't intend to be stopped. I may never have another chance. I don't care what I have to sacrifice. I'd gladly give up anything on earth for my singing. You can't think what it's like to have that in you—such a terrible longing—to know that you *can* do it, and to be stopped and turned aside and laughed at!" She bent and kissed the old lady again. "I've got to go now, grandmother dear!" she said, with a sob.

"No! Little Ethel! No!"

"I've got to, grandmother. I promised."

"Ethel! You promised what?"

The girl was frankly crying now.

"Good-by, darling!" she said. "You've always been my dearest, kindest friend. If I hadn't been a little beast, I'd never have

left you; but I am a little beast. I must go my own way. I've got to go. Good-bye, dear!"

Her hand was on the door knob.

"No, Ethel, no!" cried the old lady.

With one backward glance, tearful, soft, but utterly resolute, the girl was gone.

"Gianetta!" called Mrs. Mazetti.

Gianetta came in from the kitchen with the querulous expression natural to her. She had been the old lady's servant for nearly twenty years. She adored her, and had never found her anything but just, kind, and generous. Nevertheless, Gianetta had a great many grievances, and did not keep them to herself.

"Telephone," said her mistress, "and order me a taxi."

"You? You a taxi?" cried Gianetta.

"But that is mad!"

"Quick, Gianetta!"

"But you are very ill! With this rheumatism, you can't walk! How do you think then that you—"

"Quick, Gianetta!"

"Patience! Patience!" said Gianetta, in her most annoying tone. "I order this taxi, but you cannot get into it. It is only a waste of money. No matter—you are the mistress. I telephone!"

"Now!" said the old lady to herself. "I must get up. Leo always said that what one ought to do, one would find strength for. I must do this. For one minute more I shall sit quietly here, and then I shall rise and get myself ready."

She clasped her hands in her lap and laid her head against the back of the chair, looking out at the sky, now quite dark. Then, with a long sigh, she grasped the arms and slowly raised herself to her feet.

Gianetta, coming in again, gave a loud shriek.

"Silence, you foolish one," said the old lady. "Get me my cloak and hat."

#### IV

"I DON'T understand you," said Ladislaw, in a deeply injured voice. "You'll trust your whole life to me, and yet—"

The little wood was dark and unfamiliar, and he found it very disagreeable to hurry along at the pace she set.

"And yet you behave—" he went on.

"I'm not trusting my whole life to you," replied Ethel vehemently. "I'd be sorry to think there was nothing better than that to trust in!"

"That's not quite the way to talk to the man you're going to marry, is it?" he asked. "I've always tried my best to do what you wanted. I don't see why you shouldn't trust me."

"I don't see, either, Lad," Ethel answered, with her discounting frankness. "Only somehow you seem so—so dreadfully strange to me. I never understand you. I know you must be fond of me, or you wouldn't have asked me to marry you; and I know it's a sensible, practical idea if we're going on tour. But I can't—I can't—" She choked down a sob. "I can't feel—friendly—with you!"

"I don't want you to. I want you to love me."

"But they ought to go together!" she cried. "I'm awfully grateful to you, and I love to hear you sing, but I'm afraid! Oh, it's not fair to you, because I know I'll never feel like that!"

"You will some day," he answered, with a patience that frightened her still more.

"I've got to be honest with you, Lad. I'm sure I shall never feel so. It's only because I want this chance so much—so much that I'd do almost anything to get it. I know that if I can once sing in public, I shall be all right, and—"

He laughed softly.

"It doesn't go so fast," he said. "Nothing does. You will have what every one else has—two failures for each triumph, two pains for every joy. You will have hard work, discouragement, anxiety, and a good many other troubles you've never thought of. That's why I ask you to marry me, because you need some one to protect you. If you don't love me, very well! I'll love you twice as much, to make up for it."

His hand fell lightly on her shoulder. She sprang aside hastily.

That did not offend him. He never seemed to be offended or impatient. He was always reasonable, kind, sympathetic; and yet, instead of being pleased or touched by this, Ethel found it disquieting and mysterious.

His polite endurance of her changing humors was more like that of indifference than that of love. Of course, he did love her. He must, and she was a very fortunate girl to have found, at the very beginning of her career, a man who loved her and who could and would help her so greatly.

This first venture was in itself a thing

very displeasing to her. It was a vaudeville act of his own devising, in which, with several changes of costume, they would sing snatches from the most popular operas, all woven together to make a silly story. She tried to look beyond that, to the great triumphs of the future. She tried to feel that these triumphs would be ample compensation for the monstrous sacrifice she was making of her life.

Once in a while, in a brief flash, she half realized what she was doing. The memory of her mother came back to her—that gentle and quiet woman who had held so steadfastly to her own ideals.

No matter how ardent her desire for perfection in her beloved art, no matter how splendid her ambition, Ethel could not be rid of a secret and bitter sense of guilt. It was wrong—she knew it—it was wrong and unworthy to marry Ladislav.

"But why?" she demanded of herself. "I don't care anything about love, and men, and things like that. Ladislav knows it, and if he doesn't care, why should I? Anyhow, it's too late now. I've promised, and I'm going to keep my word. Mother would want me to do that. Oh, but if mother had been here, she would have understood! She would never have let me get into such a dreadful, miserable, heart-breaking situation! If she could come now, just for one little minute, just to say one word—"

But there was no one there except Ladislav. The lights of the railway station gleamed before them, and he drew close to her.

"Give me one kiss, Ethel!" he said, very low.

She hated his voice, she hated to have him so near her, she hated herself. The little wood seemed like a black and sinister forest.

"No!" she said brusquely, as she had often spoken to him before.

This time he was not patient and humble. He caught her arm, and tried to draw her to him.

"You shan't treat me like a dog!" he muttered.

In growing alarm, she stared at him in the dark, and she fancied she saw his white teeth revealed by a wolfish grin. With a violent wrench, she freed herself. With the swiftness of terror, she ran out of that haunted wood into the safe, bright road before the station.

As she stood there, flushed and panting, trying to consider the situation, he came leisurely up to her.

"You can't go back now—not after that telegram you sent your aunt," he said. "There's nowhere for you to go, except with me. You haven't even your ticket or your purse. You gave them to me to keep—and I mean to keep them!"

"I don't care—I'll walk," she retorted, in a trembling voice.

"Walk where?" he inquired. "You told your aunt you were going away to get married. You'll have hard work explaining that you changed your mind; and you'll have hard work getting home at all without a penny. Come! Here's the train. Don't be a little fool!"

The long, mournful hoot of the approaching engine came to her ears.

"Oh, give me my purse!" she cried in terror and despair. "Oh, please! Oh, please, Ladislav!"

"I won't," he said. "If you won't come with me, I'll leave you here alone. You'll be sorry, Ethel. You'll lose your chance to be a singer, and you'll lose more than that. Your aunt won't take this very well."

She looked around in anguish. The ticket office was closed for the night, and there were only strangers on the platform. All about that little lighted oasis were the woods and fields and tiny distant houses, filled with more strangers.

# V

"ETHEL!" cried a voice.

It was the voice of the one person who would understand and help and solace her—a voice she could never hear again in this world, strong, tender, and clear.

"Oh, mother!" she cried.

"Ethel!"

It came again, and not the voice of a spirit, but real, and close at hand.

"It's some one in that taxi," whispered Ladislav. "Better not answer."

"But it's grandmother!" said Ethel, astounded.

She flew to the old lady like a stone from a catapult.

"Grandmother, what *are* you doing here?" she demanded, wild with delight and relief.

"Nothing!" replied the old lady serenely. "Present your friend to me."

"I—" began Ethel.

Ladislav was already there, hat in hand.

"Mr. Metz, grandmother," she said.

"Ah! Mr. Metz!" the old lady repeated, looking thoughtfully at him. Her calm old eyes seemed terrible to him. "Are you leaving?" she asked.

He hesitated for a moment. Then he remembered that Ethel had never seemed to regard her grandmother as especially important. She was old, and poor, and obscure; what harm could she do?

"Yes," he said. "Ethel and I are going to be married. She's already sent a telegram to her aunt in the city, to tell her."

"You are a rash young man," said the old lady, in a tone almost friendly.

"Rash?" he repeated, with a faint frown.

"Very!" said she. "It is a surprise to me, because I see that you are not American. Americans marry that way—for love; but with the people of Europe, it is often different. They think of how they shall live. They wish a dot—a dowry—something more than love. It is very beautiful, this; because the poor little Ethel will never have anything."

Metz was too much taken aback to be discreet.

"But she will!" he said. "Her aunt will—"

"Her aunt has only the income of an estate. She leaves nothing to Ethel; and certainly she *gives* nothing to Ethel when she is the wife of Mr. Metz."

"But I thought—" he began.

Suddenly the frail little old creature blazed into magnificent wrath.

"Be off!" she cried, raising her hand in a threatening gesture. "Away with you, miserable, beggarly fortune hunter! Wolf! *Bestia!* Be off!"

He started back. She leaned out of the window, her voice wonderfully strong and vigorous for her years. As he retreated, even above the roar of the incoming train, he heard her only too plainly, and was aware that other people heard her, too.

"Beggary fortune hunter! Wolf! *Bestia!* Away with you!"

He was glad to climb on board.

The taxi went hastening back along the dark, still roads, and the old lady held the sobbing Ethel tight in her arms.

"But what is there to cry about?" she asked, in tears herself. "Foolish little one! You shall stay with me, my little bird, until you are ready to fly away. There was something put by for you to have—later. You shall have it now, for the singing lessons. Why do you cry, then? You shall sing, I tell you!"

Ethel was silent for a time.

"Grandmother!" she said. "The first time you called me—it sounded—I thought it was—mother!"

The old lady's arm tightened about her.

"It is the same voice," she said.

## INVOCATION

*Horace, Book I, Ode xxx*

ROYAL Venus, Cyprus green,  
Cnidus, Paphos, claim thee queen;  
But thy favored isle leave thou—  
Glycera implores thee now!

Incense here she offers thee,  
Prays to thee on bended knee,  
Flings her temple doors apart—  
Temple of her maiden's heart!

Enter! Make that heart thy home,  
And with thee let Cupid come;  
Ah, yes, bring thy glowing boy—  
He will fill her heart with joy!

Let the Nymphs and Graces, too,  
Girdles loosened, come with you,  
And bring Mercury! In truth,  
Without Venus, what were youth?

*Roselle Mercier Montgomery*



# The Forty-Eighth Adventure

THE MOST EXCITING EPISODE IN THE CAREER OF JAMES TIMPKINS, BOOKKEEPER AND STUDENT OF METROPOLITAN LIFE

By Robert J. Horton

THE executive and office force of Cartweight, Sills & Co., wholesale linens, boasted a rather brilliant personnel. There was Mr. Horace Cartweight himself as an instance. He was a large man, florid, with iron-gray hair and bushy black brows, from under which he frequently glared fiercely at his underlings. He always wore a gray suit with a bold display of white handkerchief in the bosom pocket.

There was Mr. George Sills. He was a tall and distinguished figure, regularly attired in a dark, double-breasted coat, offset by a cravat of daring color or pattern. He ran to wearing white carnations in his buttonhole.

The other member of the firm, Mr. Morgan, was a dapper individual with one of those mustaches originally imported from abroad, and a penchant for tweeds and sport suits.

Even Mr. Behr, the cashier, had something of the atmosphere of a Long Branch week-end party about him. He belonged to an exclusive golf club, and he acquired an accent about the time he made his first score of ninety. This accent was very much respected by the office workers, and had even impressed Mr. Cartweight, who had concealed his interest by heavy frowns.

Now it can readily be perceived that with such an illustrious quartet of higher-ups setting such a transcendent example, the remaining members of the office force, to the best of their various tastes and incomes, followed the lead of their chiefs. As a result, the office of Cartweight, Sills & Co., was, in a way, smart. The firm did a good business.

Curious as it may appear to some, none of the individuals so far mentioned is the principal character of this narrative. In-

deed, if one had gone into the offices of the Cartweight concern, the last person he would have thought of as being at all likely to prove interesting would have been James Timpkins.

In all that sea of color Mr. Timpkins was the one drab spot. His hair was graying rapidly. He was small in stature, and, in the opinion of some of his fellow bookkeepers, small in other ways. He was not above having his shoes half-sole'd twice, and the uppers sewed. He was not particular as to the crease in his trousers, or as to the wear they showed.

On the other hand, he was very particular as to his figures and their accuracy. Perhaps the reason why he had remained a bookkeeper in that concern for something like twenty years lay in the fact that he was a slave to detail. He was a conscientious, dependable, faithful cog in the office machinery of Cartweight, Sills & Co., and he was paid as such.

They tolerated him as "old Jim"—and "tolerated" is the word.

"Poor old Jim!" they would say. "Little he gets out of life!"

And that's as much as they knew.

For while the members of the firm played with their business, their country homes, and their motors; while the cashier played at his golf and practiced his accent; while the others played with their hobby of keeping up the best appearance possible, James Timpkins had the greatest plaything of all.

Old Jim played with the city of New York.

His work he took for granted. He enjoyed it, and he did it well. He accepted the stern domination of his landlady, Mrs. Lavina Sterns, with his customary meekness. He did not attempt to change his

simple mode of life, even though he had a neat sum in a savings account. He patronized dairy lunches cheerfully, and never once complained of Mrs. Sterns's hard floors, hard bed, or hard fare. He was by way of being the prey of imposition.

But when his day's work was over, when he had swung uptown on a subway strap and consumed Mrs. Sterns's dinner, when he had climbed the two flights to his modest rear room, sidled in, and closed the door, then Mr. Timpkins was a new and different man.

His blue eyes would sparkle as he polished his glasses. His ruddy face would glow as he dressed and prepared for the street.

For the streets of Gotham—the ill-smelling, crowded thoroughfares of the lower East Side, the quiet residential streets, the glittering avenues, and the little islands of parks from the Battery to Morningside—all were his when his hours were his own. The city's life and movement were the very heart's blood in his veins.

"Old Jim" Timpkins—oh, no one would have believed it!—was an adventurer and a seeker of romance.

Here we come to Mr. Timpkins's most valued possession. His bank deposit? His position? His reputation? *Never!* Mr. Timpkins's one real treasure was a notebook of ample size, bound in red leather.

While he is away at the office, let us steal into his room, reach far down into his trunk—ignoring the double lock which so much irritated Mrs. Sterns—take the notebook out, and peep into it.

The first page is inscribed:

#### MY ADVENTURES

Turn the page. There!

NO. 1—THE ADVENTURE OF THE YOUNG MAN WHO WANTED CAR FARE HOME TO PHILADELPHIA.

That had been years before, and it was not until the young man approached Mr. Timpkins a second time that he discovered that his philanthropy had been misplaced.

But no matter—it had started his series of adventures.

A few pages further:

NO. 14—THE ADVENTURE OF THE OLD LADY WHO FELL ON FOURTEENTH STREET.

If Timpkins hadn't been on the streets that night, he wouldn't have been there to

help her up, to gather her packages, to see her to her car. He wouldn't have had the memory of the grateful smile she had bestowed upon him as a reward. An incident to some, it was a pleasing adventure for Timpkins.

Still again:

NO. 36—THE ADVENTURE OF THE DRUNKEN SAILOR IN BRYANT PARK WHO TOLD ME OF A MAN HE ONCE KILLED.

Timpkins had listened in awe and wonder and trembling. He was a peaceful, law-abiding man; but for two intoxicated hours he had sailed the seven seas with that swashbuckler of the bounding main. It was one of a hundred strange tales his city of Manhattan had told him on her streets. He had taken three nights to put it down in his adventure book.

There you have Mr. Timpkins's secret. He went out into the city, of nights and Sundays and holidays, seeking adventures—and he found them. They were adventures which would seem tame to some, of course, but not to him. He *understood* them. He took pleasure, too, in writing them down, in keeping a neat record.

Alas, as we glance through the book, we find no adventures of the heart! Mr. Timpkins was not a ladies' man. He had—purely by chance, perhaps—been singularly free of love affairs.

True, he had often paused at his window when he saw the nice-looking lady in the second-floor rear across the way. Once or twice, when he had been pottering with the flowers in the box under his window, and she had been hanging out some kind of a large green bird in a cage outside her window they had waved; but those could hardly be called adventures. He knew that she lived alone, and that she was very pleasant-looking; but that was all.

In the years since he had been keeping his record, Mr. Timpkins had had exactly forty-seven adventures which he had considered worthy of inscribing in his book.

On an afternoon in early autumn he shed his office coat in keen anticipation. The tang of approaching winter was in the air. The parks were flaunting those marvelous colors with which nature atones for her annual season of bleakness. The blood was stirring in his veins, and he knew it must be stirring in the veins of others.

It was a good season for adventures.

That very night might provide the material for No. 48.

Among other things, Mr. Timpkins was an optimist.

## II

FATE deals out some queer mixtures—usually at times when we want straight potions.

When Mr. Timpkins reached his room that evening, he was in unusually good spirits. It still was light, and he walked to the window and opened it wide. The crisp, cool air invigorated him. He looked about his small domain with beaming features. There was nothing of old Jim, the office slave, about him now. He was the ruler of—

His features fell. Gloom succeeded surprise. He stared at the chair beside his table. This chair should have been a morris chair. There had been a morris chair in this room when he had taken it five years before. He had become used to it. It had, in fact, become a part of his domestic life—a big part. It was in the morris chair that he had sat and written his experiences in his adventure book under the glow of his table lamp. Now it had been replaced by a common rocking-chair, and not a very comfortable one, at that!

Doubtless Mrs. Sterns had thought she could rent her vacant second front more speedily if it contained such a comfortable chair as his had been; so she had imposed upon him again.

He had been there so long, had made such an ideal boarder, that she doubtless assumed he was a fixture.

Timpkins was as near being downright mad as he ever had been in his life. He decided to go to Mrs. Sterns, and demand that his chair be returned at once, or he would quit the place.

But he didn't. Mr. Timpkins often thought of asserting his rights, but he never acted on the impulse. It didn't seem to be in him—that's all.

He looked wistfully out of the window, toward the window across the way, and then turned to his dressing. Was the change of chairs to be the adventure he had anticipated?

He descended the two flights of stairs far less cheerfully than he had gone up them; but, once on the streets, his spirits revived considerably.

He walked westward to Riverside Drive. The Jersey skies, across the river, were stained with sunset red. Lights were twin-

ling along the opposite shore. Many people were out, and Timpkins walked slowly northward until he had crossed the viaduct at One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street.

Twilight descended, drawing a purple veil across the Palisades. Night flung its velvet cloak over the city, held it for a space, and then lifted it, to show the high vault of the heavens blossoming into stars. The windows of the tall apartment houses glowed with light. The river moved slowly—a dark ribbon dancing with varicolored spangles. The breeze freshened, and so did the sounds.

Mr. Timpkins sat on a bench and listened understandingly to the wailing instrument of a belated organ grinder; to the sharp yelps of dogs tugging at restraining leashes; to the frank laughter of maids and youths; to the bits of conversation wafted to him from passing couples; to the purr of smooth-running motors.

"'S good for the birds! 'S good for the birds! Makes 'em sing! Makes 'em sing!"

Mr. Timpkins was startled. The voice had shrilled the queer message almost in his ears. He turned to see a short, thick-set man hastily putting a black hood over a cage he held in his hand. This done, the man picked up a package he had put upon the bench, hurried across the driveway, and walked up a side street.

Mr. Timpkins rose immediately. He didn't know exactly why he followed the man with the cage and the package. He didn't stop to reason it out. It was one of those hunches which often led him into an adventure. His eyes were bright, his step elastic, his lips parted in excitement.

He saw the man ahead go up a short flight of steps into a brownstone house. Mr. Timpkins sighed. Here had been the promising start of an adventure, but the trail had ended in less than a block.

He slacked his pace, gazing idly about. A man was standing across the street, swinging a stick. Mr. Timpkins recollected that he had several times been upon the verge of buying a stick. It must be soothing to stand and swing a light malacca.

Just then he saw the man with the cage and package descending the steps a short distance ahead. Mr. Timpkins's heart bounded. He thrilled. There was the man again. Fate! The city's great god of coincidence was standing by him!

He followed casually as the man walked

on up the street, and saw him enter another house. That was peculiar!

He walked on in a casual manner to the corner, and lounged in the comparative shadow of the awning in front of a soft drink establishment. He kept an eye down the street.

Some time passed, and Mr. Timpkins again felt qualms of misgiving. Well, anyway, if the man did not appear again, it had been a peculiar experience. It must be remembered that Mr. Timpkins had a fair imagination.

He was about to turn back and resume his walk along the river when he saw the man with the cage and the package coming down the steps. He drew a deep breath of relief. He decided to make an adventure out of the experience by asking the man what he had meant by shouting:

"'S good for the birds! Makes 'em sing!"

To his amazement, the man came directly toward him. Not only that, but when he reached a position directly in front of Mr. Timpkins, he stopped abruptly and closed in on him.

"Here! Take these an' hold 'em a minute till I get back."

The man thrust the cage and the package into Mr. Timpkins's hands. Timpkins was too much amazed not to take them. He gasped with astonishment as the fingers of one hand closed over the handle of the bird cage, and the fingers of the other gripped the handle of the package.

"What—what—say—"

But the man had hurried around the corner and was out of sight.

Mr. Timpkins's eyes bulged as he looked down at the unwieldy cage, covered with its black hood, and the bulky package that he held in his other hand.

### III

For some minutes Mr. Timpkins stood, holding his absurd burden, and striving to figure it all out. He concluded that the short man had had some important and imperative errand, and had meant to leave his property with him until he had attended to this pressing business. He decided to await the stranger's return.

So he stood quietly, just out of the glare of the lights of the refreshment emporium, and waited.

Five minutes passed—ten—a quarter of an hour.

Mr. Timpkins began to fidget. His position was a peculiar one. Here he was standing, holding in each hand something which did not belong to him, waiting, he did not know why, for some one whom he did not know.

He began to feel irritated. He was not a checking station! Why should a stranger run up to him and expect him to render a service of such an unusual nature on such short notice? Why, it was preposterous! His part in the affair was lacking in dignity. And yet—well, whatever the outcome of the business, it certainly was something to put down in the adventure book.

Having thus reasoned in extenuation, he continued to wait until half an hour had passed. By this time he was looking this way and that, and frowning. He put his burdens down on the walk and polished his glasses. He stepped to the corner and peered up and down the street.

He returned to his cage and package—or, rather, to the cage and package which had been intrusted to him. He decided to investigate. If the man who had left the things with him did not want them investigated, he should have taken better care of them. He had no business to impose on Timpkins, in the first place. It was a queer proceeding at best.

Mr. Timpkins stepped to the edge of the light with the cage, and lifted the hood. He saw a large, beautifully colored bird.

"'S good for the birds! 'S good for the birds! Makes 'em sing! Makes 'em—"

Mr. Timpkins hastily dropped the hood over the cage. He looked quickly about with a startled gaze as the shrill voice died away.

So it had been the man's parrot that had shrieked into his ears! But what had the man been doing with a parrot, and why should he intrust the bird to the keeping of a total stranger, no matter how pressing his business elsewhere might be? Perhaps he wished to sell the parrot. Perhaps he was taking it from house to house in an effort to find a purchaser.

Mr. Timpkins was nettled. He could see no reason why he should continue to stand there indefinitely, waiting for the rightful owner of the bird and the package to show up.

He thought of inspecting the package, which was secured with a shawl strap, but immediately gave up the idea. After all, he was not particularly concerned with either



the parrot or the package. He decided to make an effort to find their owner. If he was unsuccessful, he would turn the property over to the police or—somebody. Mr. Timpkins was a little confused on this point.

Carrying the cage and package, he rounded the corner and started up the street in the direction which he thought the man had taken. He looked into the refreshment place, a cigar store, and several shops, without seeing a sign of him. In the middle of the block it occurred to Mr. Timpkins that the man's own parrot might be the best means of attracting his attention, if he was anywhere near.

He noted that there were few pedestrians in his immediate vicinity. Then, acting on impulse, he lifted the hood on the cage.

"S' good for the birds! Makes 'em sing!"

Mr. Timpkins dropped the hood with something of a thrill. Evidently the parrot had been trained to cry out that message when the hood was lifted and it could see the light.

This certainly was a novel adventure! It was the queerest adventure he ever had had.

He looked about, but the owner of the bird failed to appear. Such pedestrians as had heard seemed but mildly interested. Mr. Timpkins looked up at the windows of the apartments over the shops. Probably the man was in one of these. He would take one more chance. There was no one near him, and the policeman on the other side of the street was walking with his back toward Timpkins.

Again he lifted the hood.

"Makes 'em sing!" shrilled the parrot. "To hell with the police!"

Mr. Timpkins dropped the hood like a plummet. He gasped, and his eyes bulged, as he saw the policeman across the street whirl about. Then he started rapidly back down the street, carrying the cage and the package.

Now he resolved to get rid of his burdens as speedily as possible. Evidently the parrot's vocabulary was not entirely confined to that proclamation about something or other being good for birds and making them sing. It would seem that the bird had a distinct dislike for the minions of the law.

Mr. Timpkins hurried around the corner with a furtive look over his shoulder,

and stopped where he had waited so long for the mysterious owner of the parrot.

Because of the bird's last exclamation, he had his doubts about turning it over to the police. If the hood was removed in the officer's presence, it was just possible that the parrot might voice another imprecation, which would not only irritate the representative of constituted authority, but might result in him, Timpkins, being looked upon with suspicion.

He decided to put cage and package down on the walk near the wall of the building, and leave them there.

But, as he started to do this, the germ of Mr. Timpkins's adventurous spirit bestirred itself. There was no gainsaying the fact that this was an adventure, and a remarkable one, at that. If he left the bird, it would be ended; but something told Mr. Timpkins that the incident would not end there—ought not to end there. He was loath to have it end there.

Besides, the man might return looking for his bird and package, and find them gone. More than likely, some one would make away with them. Then the man might advertise in the newspapers, and Mr. Timpkins would thus have an opportunity to return the man his property and to hear his story. That would be a more satisfactory ending to the adventure than to close it by abandoning the cage and the package.

Mr. Timpkins came to a sudden decision. He would take his charges home.

On his way down Riverside Drive, he thought he saw a man on a bench signal to him. He walked close to the bench, saw the man stare at him with a blank expression, decided that he had been mistaken, and went on. Twice again this peculiar thing happened. Mr. Timpkins felt that the adventure was getting on his nerves.

He hurried on to his boarding house, shifting the heavy package and the lighter cage from hand to hand. It was nearly ten o'clock, and he hoped that Mrs. Sterns would not be about to see him come in. He inserted his key and entered softly, setting the cage on the floor, and reaching back through the door for the package. Then he closed the door and stole up the stairs.

On the first landing he met his landlady.

"Good evening," he greeted breathlessly.

Mrs. Sterns lifted her thin brows.

"Mr. Timpkins, what have you there?" she asked severely.

"Tell you all about it to-morrow, Mrs. Sterns," he replied, hurrying on.

He fairly ran up the second flight, fumbled with his key, and finally got his door open, just as Mrs. Sterns appeared at the top of the stairs. He got inside and shut his door. He could hear Mrs. Sterns retreating, muttering to herself.

"To the devil with landladies!" he said aloud, as he switched on the light and set the cage on the floor.

As he did so, the hood string caught on the buttons of his sleeve, and the cover lifted as he raised his arm.

"To the devil with landladies!" shrieked the parrot in a high falsetto, to Mr. Timpkins's horrified amazement.

#### IV

He quickly dropped the hood over the parrot's cage, and stood in a tremble. He heard Mrs. Sterns hurrying back up the stairs and along the hall. She stopped outside his door.

"Did you say something, Mr. Timpkins?" she called.

He thought her voice sounded excited and anxious.

"Not—exactly," he managed to answer in a hoarse tone.

"I was going to tell you"—yes, her tone was indubitably supplicating—"I was going to tell you that I just borrowed your Morris chair for a day or two, until I rent the front room, and then you can have it back."

After all, Mr. Timpkins was a steady boarder, and paid regularly in advance.

"Very well," he said, relief giving strength to his voice.

"Of course, if you want it right away, I suppose I could get it for you."

Mrs. Sterns had evidently mistaken the parrot's cry for Mr. Timpkins's voice, and for very good reason suspected he was exceedingly irritated.

"No, a day or two will do," said Mr. Timpkins, through the door.

Mrs. Sterns retreated. Timpkins grinned at the hooded cage of the parrot. The bird had produced results in an unexpected quarter. Perhaps it would be well if he assumed a more stern and dignified attitude toward his landlady.

He turned his attention to the package. Lifting it to the bed, he unstrapped it, and unwrapped the thick paper about it. A dozen bottles were exposed. Mr. Timp-

kins swore an inoffensive oath as he read one of the labels:

#### WALKER'S BIRD MEDICINE

A Tonic for All Feathered Pets

IT MAKES THEM SING

Parrots Talk and Canaries Warble on a Teaspoonful

DR. WALKER, THE BIRD DOCTOR

The bottles were all labeled alike. Mr. Timpkins gathered them up and put them in a lower drawer of his wardrobe. He was much incensed at the thought that he had been imposed upon by a faker. The parrot's cry was now explained. The "bird doctor" used the parrot for advertising purposes.

Well, the bird was trained, and the faker would certainly want him back. He would surely advertise. Mr. Timpkins was resolved that the man would pay him for his trouble—and pay him well.

Anyway, it had been an unusual adventure—one of those queer repasts the city was continually dishing up to him.

He hung the parrot cage outside his window on one of the hooks that held his flower box. Then he sat down in the uncomfortable chair, to think it all over.

#### V

MR. TIMPKINS heard the doorbell ring, and a few minutes afterward steps sounded on the stairs. Two people came the length of the hall to his door.

He waited for the knock, but none came. Instead, the knob was turned, and a man stepped over the threshold. In one hand he held a light malacca stick; the other hand was under his coat at his hip. Mr. Timpkins started as he recognized the man whom he had seen swinging a cane on the opposite side of the street when he had been following the man with the cage.

Mrs. Sterns was behind the intruder.

"Pleasant evening," said the stranger, walking over to where Mr. Timpkins had hastily risen and was standing, open-mouthed and helpless.

The man felt his pockets. Then he stepped back with a quizzical look.

"I expect you thought we'd never catch on to that wrinkle," he said coolly, eyeing Mr. Timpkins narrowly. "Where's your sweet-talking parrot?"

Mr. Timpkins could only stare. The man's speech and manner were plainly ag-

gressive. Perhaps he thought that the bookkeeper had stolen the parrot. It was best to spar for time.

"What—*what* parrot?" stammered Mr. Timpkins.

The stranger's face froze.

"Say, listen, my friend! The game is up. Your partner is where he belongs. You didn't think we'd be so dense as to miss that transfer of the cage and the other stuff, did you? We laid off to find out where you guys lived. We've got you cold, and you might as well come clean."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Timpkins exclaimed in a frightened voice.

"Oh, well, I don't blame you for trying to bluff it through. You don't have to talk to me unless you want to. You'll talk before you're through!"

He was looking about the place as he spoke. Now he walked to the window, keeping an eye on Mr. Timpkins, thrust aside the curtains, reached out, and brought the parrot's cage to view.

"I thought so!" he said with a grim smile, as he carried the cage to the table.

With a significant glance at Mrs. Sterns, whose eyes were popping out of her head, he lifted the hood. The parrot came to life immediately.

"S good for the birds! Makes 'em sing! To hell with prohibition!"

The man laughed harshly.

"Clever line you taught him—that last," he sneered. "Where's the stuff?" he demanded, as he dropped the hood over the cage.

"If—if you mean—that bird medicine—it's in that drawer," stuttered Mr. Timpkins, pointing, his face white as chalk.

The stranger quickly opened the drawer and took out two of the bottles. He withdrew their corks one at a time, and sniffed at them.

"Pretty good-smelling Scotch, at that," he leered. "Had to peddle good stuff in that neighborhood, eh?"

"Scotch?" said Timpkins blankly. "It says 'bird medicine'—"

"Cut it!" said his visitor sharply. "I tell you we've got your partner, and the stuff is off. If you don't want to talk to me, you can talk to the judge. Get your hat an' coat on."

"But listen!" cried Timpkins excitedly. "I never saw that man or this—this—parrot and stuff before to-night in my life.

The fellow told me to hold them for him a minute—"

He was interrupted by the other's acrid laugh grating in his ears. The man turned to the stupefied Mrs. Sterns.

"Madam, I am Saunders, a government agent. I have to tell you that you've evidently been the dupe of a bootlegger, as I have reason to believe you are running a respectable house. This man and another have been using that parrot as a blind to sell pints of booze at retail up here. The stuff was supposed to be bird medicine. They had a number of regular customers, who could not afford to buy by the case, and they took this means of delivering in small quantities. Two of our men have purchased liquor from the other fellow, and to-night was the first time we learned this man was one of the gang. Probably he is the brains of it—he's a mighty good actor. I'm sorry, but we'll have to search your house."

Mrs. Sterns remained speechless; but such was not the case with Mr. Timpkins. Confronted by the horrible truth, he blurted out his story in impassioned language, while Saunders coolly lit a cigarette.

"My landlady will tell you how long I've lived here, and where I work," Mr. Timpkins concluded, with huge beads of sweat standing out on his brow.

"Hasn't this man been in the custom of going out at night and coming in late?" Saunders asked Mrs. Sterns.

"Why—yes—sometimes," faltered the woman. "But—"

"Never mind!" said Saunders sternly. "That's enough." Then, turning upon the white-faced Timpkins: "Didn't I see you sit down on that bench up there to-night? Didn't I see you get up an' follow that other fellow? Didn't I see you stall around while he went in to deliver to two customers? Didn't I see him slip you the stuff on the corner? Wasn't I watching when you went halfway up the block and let the parrot yell that signal? Didn't I see you staring up at the windows, to see if any customers who heard would give you the high sign? Don't talk to me any more. Shut up!"

He instructed Mrs. Sterns to go down to the front door and admit another operative who was waiting there. While she was gone, he looked about Mr. Timpkins's room.

When Mrs. Sterns returned with the op-

erative, Saunders instructed the man to remain in the house until more men arrived to search it in the morning.

"And you'd better keep this woman under surveillance until we've combed the premises. I'll take two bottles of this stuff along, and leave the rest and the parrot here. We'll take 'em down later. Now, then, come on!"

He motioned to Mr. Timpkins. The adventurous bookkeeper's heart was a cold, icy thing within his breast.

"Where—where are you going?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"To the Ritz, of course," replied Saunders sarcastically.

But Mr. Timpkins knew.

## VI

THOSE readers who, without making a practice of it, have spent a night in jail will understand the reaction which the experience had upon Mr. Timpkins, whose life, in the main, had been simple to the point of monotony. Up to this time, even his wildest adventures had been of undoubted mildness.

His first sensation, when locked behind the bars, was one of consuming fear. As the early morning hours wore on, this gave way to a feeling of intense resentment against the owner of the parrot, against the police, and against fate in general. Daybreak found him considering a new and grave angle—the problem of getting out.

After all, the average person who gets into jail is mainly concerned with getting out, and Mr. Timpkins was no exception.

When breakfast was brought in to him, he demanded a lawyer. He made other demands, also; for the seriousness of his predicament lent him courage. He was laughed at; and this made him genuinely mad. Wasn't he a respectable person? Didn't he have a respectable job? Hadn't he a respectable sum of money in the savings bank? Was this, then, to be his reward for years of toil and frugal living?

He worked himself into something closely resembling a fury, while other prisoners jeered at him. He told them who he was, and they jeered the more.

Then he began to have his doubts. Bit by bit his false courage oozed. Again the sweat came out on his brow. What, pray tell, was to prevent them from *keeping* him there?

Thus Mr. Timpkins was in a pliable mood when Saunders had him brought out later in the morning.

"You can go down to your office. I may want you again later," said the officer noncommittally.

Mr. Timpkins breathed a great sigh of relief as he hurried to the subway. It was eleven o'clock. Did the office know about—about—the mistake? He bravely hoped that no word of the ignominious affair had reached Cartweight, Sills & Co. He invented three perfectly good excuses for being so late. Anyway, they could not complain. He hadn't been tardy in years.

He had hardly entered the office when he saw that he was an object of interest. Mr. Behr, the cashier, nodded pleasantly, and spoke to Mr. Timpkins in his best accent. Others greeted the bookkeeper—fellow workers who had been in the habit of passing him up. It was all very strange—but *was* it? Mr. Timpkins blushed. He looked guilty, yet at the same time he seemed, in a way, flushed with elation. Regardless of the means by which it had been accomplished, he had at last attracted some measure of attention. He was no longer the drab spot.

Then came a peremptory summons from the private office. Mr. Timpkins's face paled, but he marched bravely forth to his fate.

He found Mr. Cartweight and Mr. Sills waiting for him, and—*Saunders!*

So the officer had followed him—had sneaked in on him—had told all to his employers! A strong emotion surged in Mr. Timpkins.

Mr. Cartweight and Mr. Sills looked grave. They rather avoided his eyes. Saunders puffed complacently on a huge cigar. Mr. Cartweight cleared his throat.

"Ah—Timpkins! Sit down!"

Mr. Timpkins dropped limply into a convenient chair.

"Ah—Timpkins! Mr. Saunders, here, has come to us and has investigated your previous record. He is disposed to be lenient."

Cartweight spoke slowly, and impressively, looking now and then at Mr. Sills, who nodded.

"In fact," Mr. Cartweight continued, "he is going to let you off. He followed you here after you were—ah—released, to make sure that you reported to work, and didn't report to—ah—any other associates



you might have. I understand he has made certain other investigations, and I believe, so far as you are concerned, the case is dropped. Is that so, Mr. Saunders?"

Saunders nodded, rose, and, with a broad grin at Mr. Timpkins, took his departure.

Mr. Cartweight and Mr. Sills both seemed relieved, as well as Mr. Timpkins; but the two members of the firm now stared at the adventurous bookkeeper with puzzled expressions.

"Tell me, Timpkins, how in the devil did you ever have the nerve to do it?" Mr. Cartweight asked, arching his bushy brows.

"Do what?" said the astonished Mr. Timpkins.

"Why, peddle bootleg on the side. Isn't your salary here sufficient to support you?"

"Why—why, Mr. Cartweight!"

"Oh, I know it hasn't been as large as it might be," conceded the head of the firm. "We can remedy that the first of the year, I think; but you were so—so unassuming—so clever, too. That bird stunt you fellows worked was a wonder!"

Horace Cartweight actually chuckled, while Timpkins stared at him in stupefied amazement.

"But it's got to stop," said Cartweight sternly. "It would be a reflection on the firm to have a man in its employ *selling* it. I sincerely hope, Timpkins, that this will be a lesson to you. I know that you are the victim of a condition prevailing in this country of which I—we—do not altogether approve; and that's the only reason why we are permitting you to retain your position here."

As Mr. Sills nodded confirmation of this remarkable statement, Mr. Timpkins found his voice.

"I don't *have* to sell bootleg or anything like that!" he shrilled. "I've money in the bank that I've saved. Didn't that—that Saunders tell you how I was tricked into this thing?"

Then he leaped to his feet and told the story that he had told Saunders—which Saunders had already told, in part, to his employers. They listened patiently. When the bookkeeper finished, Mr. Cartweight drummed upon his desk with his fingers and stared absently out of the window.

"Well, anyway," he said tartly, swinging about in his chair, "that will be all, Mr. Timpkins."

Timpkins left the office stunned. Didn't they believe him?

Mr. Morgan, the junior partner, glowing in new tweeds, stopped him.

"I was thinking," he said, with a furtive smile, "that if you have any of that stuff left—the officer said it was pretty good grade—I might be able to take it off your hands. Some fellows at the club—you know! Of course, I don't sanction such a business as a rule, but in your case, and to help you to get started right again—"

Mr. Morgan walked away, leaving Timpkins white-faced, gripping his palms. He saw Mr. Behr, the cashier, smiling at him amiably. Then he hurried for his coat and hat, and flung himself out of the office.

## VII

MR. TIMPKINS listened sleepily to various details hurled at him by Mrs. Sterns. They had searched the house—*her* house! No, they hadn't found anything, of course; but the *disgrace!* And that parrot! *That parrot!* It had hung outside his window all morning while the officers had pursued their labors. They had taken off the hood, for spite, of course, and the things that parrot had said!

Well, she, Mrs. Sterns, was a nervous wreck. She probably would have to go to the hospital. Maybe he, Mr. Timpkins, would learn some time to quit gadding around at night. He was an old fool. He could keep his room, but he would have to change his ways and settle down. No wonder they thought at the office that he had been doing a little bootlegging on the side. Who wouldn't, under the circumstances? Yes, he had better get some sleep.

It was dinner time when Mr. Timpkins woke. He went bravely down to the table. His sleep had refreshed him, and he felt strangely exultant. He smiled down Mrs. Sterns's frowns until even that lady confessed that it was a "strange world."

Then Mr. Timpkins had a visitor. He smiled and stammered in embarrassment when he recognized the pleasant-faced lady from across the way.

"I took the liberty of calling to ask you about your parrot," she said in a sweet voice. "I have one, and have always been interested in them. I thought that yours—from the way it—it talked this morning—might be a sea parrot. I've always been interested in parrots that have been on ships, because my husband—I'm a widow—followed the sea."

Something in her manner and voice struck a responsive chord in Mr. Timpkins. He ushered her into the parlor, and poured his strange tale into her sympathetic ears. It almost seemed as if they had known each other for ages.

When he showed her to the door, it had begun to rain. He procured his umbrella, and took her to her home around the block.

Half an hour later, Mrs. Sterns was staring at him in astonishment while he spoke in a new and authoritative tone.

"Mrs. Sterns, regardless of the unfortunate happenings of the past twenty-four

hours. I shall have to ask that my chair be returned to my room to-night, or I shall have to seek other accommodations."

Then he walked briskly up the stairs.

Another half hour, and Mr. Timpkins was seated in his morris chair under his shaded lamp. On the arm of the chair was a leather-bound book. It was opened at a page. Mr. Timpkins dipped a pen in ink and began to write:

NO. 48—ADVENTURE OF THE PARROT AND THE REVENUE OFFICERS AND THE LADY—

He paused, and stared dreamily at the window.

## For a Name

GOUTRAN, THE PIG, COULD NOT HAVE FORESEEN THE  
PURPOSE TO WHICH HIS FIVE HUNDRED  
FRANCS WOULD BE PUT

By Clara Maxwell Taft

**D**ABNEY, threading the streets of Paris, head and shoulders above the crowd, suggested, with his narrow frame, torpid eyes, and pallid face, the pike of Revolutionary days topped with the head of an aristocrat.

His feet fumbled and behaved themselves uncertainly, as if his brain had no control over members so remote. One arm swung heavily at his side, like the pendulum of a discouraged clock. The other curved about a fair-sized painting, his last completed work, four times rejected by unappreciative dealers, on its way to the fifth hope. His waistcoat flapped over a craving for three meals now overdue.

At the Rue Bonaparte he turned to the right, diagonaled his way across the street, as one to whom the shortest cut had become a necessity, and stumbled up three black flights of stairs. A pull at a worn and dirty bell rope, followed by a clang, hoarse and strident as a mocking laugh, heralded his entrance to a cluttered back room. What might have been a glance from under a pair of pudgy eyelids served as his greeting.

Goutran, without rising, held out an unsteady hand for the canvas that Dabney had already commenced to uncover. Without so much as a nod toward the artist, the flaccid art dealer rose, placed the picture upright on the table, stepped backward to the far side of the room, and worked fat round hands into inadequate trouser pockets. First from the corner of the left eye, then from the corner of the right, he shot a hurried squint at Dabney's bit of Luxembourg Garden, which so poorly fitted into this joyless room.

"The eye of the buyer and the eye of the seller," the people of the Quartier Latin had come to term these slits of light that lodged beneath the pulpy lids of Goutran. If the right eye sometimes appraised and approved, often the left eye distrusted. A pig, the artists called Goutran. He was not in the business as an art lover, but as a money getter; yet a really good thing never found him cold, though his tactics for acquiring something for next to nothing were well known and vigorously despised.

Clutching Dabney's canvas close in his thick fingers, he thrust his great face into

it. His coarse lashes almost grazed the glowing trees, the steaming flowers, the shimmery tremble of the baking air that enveloped, like a white-hot fog, this captured bit of noonday.

"Um! Raining," he said at length, with a twist of his heavy shoulders.

Dabney flushed and winced; but he knew Goutran, and knew his tricks. He pulled aside the window curtain and curiously peered into the clouding day.

"Not yet," he responded, pretending to misunderstand.

Goutran drew up the collar of his coat.

"Too cold for most people."

He shivered. He rubbed his hands together, as if contact with the canvas had chilled them, and directed his tiny searchlights along a line that swerved at Dabney and terminated at the picture.

"Five hundred francs for it." He rolled his heavy head from side to side. "Not a sou more!" he snarled, catching the stiffening of the other's figure.

A great pulse choked and beat at Dabney's throat. He drew a hand across his neck, as if to unstrangle his voice.

"Five thousand will buy it," he managed at last, his eyes flaring. "It's big—you know it's big!"

Goutran forced a dry chuckle.

"The price, yes—quite so."

Taking care to busy his fingers solely with the wrapping, though they itched to be at the pudgy art dealer's grimy collar, Dabney grasped his canvas. From a lower tenement a whiff of burning soup writhed in through the shutters, worked its way up his nostrils, touched the back of his tongue. Goutran got it at the same instant, and ran a glance up the other's hungry length. The muscles of his mouth gave way to let a smile sag off:

"And how are the cafés these days, M. Dabney, eh?"

The question caught Dabney in the doorway.

"They're well rid of me, Goutran—and I of you!"

"You'll be back!" shrilled Goutran.

## II

DOWN the three murky flights Dabney lurched and tottered, his precious canvas pressed under a quivering arm, the echo of Goutran's "You'll be back" trailing after him like an inverted prophecy. On the lowest step crouched a diminutive drab

mongrel. Dabney almost stepped on the wretched animal.

"Hungry, too, old sport?" he asked, stooping, for a second, to scratch between the dejected ears. "Wish I had a bone for you!"

At every corner, food called and beckoned him: called, here, in a voice no louder than the chink of dish upon dish; beckoned, there, with a long and odorous finger of crusty bread. From across the street the Pantheon tendered its printed invitation: "*Le Petit Dejeuner—Le Dejeuner à la Fourchette—Table d'Hôte Avec Vin*"—promising better and bigger as the day waxed.

Dabney sighed his sincere regrets, lifted his shoulders, drew back his head, and partook in deep drafts of his fourth consecutive meal from nature's restaurant for the empty-pocketed.

The Rue Bonaparte leads directly to the Seine, and just across the river the massive Louvre stretches its great stone arms. From the river, with its skimming notes of color, Dabney turned his eyes to the gray bridge, with its huddling gray figures and humping cabs, and to the grayer Louvre. Whatever of solace the whole gray world contained blossomed within those grizzled walls—rows of color, ranks of haunting, whispering personalities, lines of dried and faded signatures more vocal than the million voices of this seething, living Paris.

Halfway over the bridge he stopped, leaned on the parapet, and looked down upon the busy river. Boat after boat poked its nose from beneath the arches and puffed on toward Notre Dame. If only he could drop his maddening thoughts upon a passing craft and watch them hurry from him, melting in the widening distance like colors from a fading sunset! If only he could hurl after them each vestige of defeat! That great fellow in the red shirt on the sliding deck below—what sport to frame his coarse, unsuspecting neck in a shattered fragment of the Luxembourg!

Dabney chuckled. Half unconsciously he raised an arm.

"Hello!"

A genial voice reached his ear, and a smart clap on the lifted shoulder swung him face about. There they stood, three in a row, his best pals, whom he had not seen in weeks—Spencer, the American student; Quinan, the English cartoonist, and Benet, the young French poet.

Sliding his canvas to the sidewalk, Dabney strove to fling his welcoming hands in three directions at once.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" he cried—to each man a separate greeting, as if to compensate for the shortage in hands.

The three faces shone upon him. Spencer continued his cordial slaps on the shoulder, Benet took possession of both hands in his own two, while Quinan, the cartoonist, with an eye for line and shadow, took a step backward and sent a roaming look from the head to the feet of his friend.

"Say, haven't you been overdoin' it a bit, old man?" he queried. "Too much work and no play, you know!" Here a second glance took in the neglected canvas. "Let's see what you have to show for it, anyway!"

Dabney reached for the picture. The three clustered about it. With twitching lips the artist studied the pupils of their eyes and the revealing lines about their mouths. A warmth started at his feet and tingled to his ears.

The Frenchman was first to speak.

"Ah, my friend!" he cried. "It is my poetry—in color! My poetry that is not yet written—that sings itself here!" He pressed a hand to his heart. "You understand, eh?"

He clasped his hands, only to fling them apart and bring them together again. His little beard and the shiny ends of his mustache quivered.

Spencer, with a hand on Dabney's shoulder, said nothing; but, to Dabney, the gleam in his friend's eyes was more golden than words. It was the practical Englishman who must know where the artist intended to dispose of it.

Dabney sniggered.

"I was on the point of pitching it overboard when you fellows came. See!" He motioned toward a little steamer far down the river. "It would have been almost at the Morgue by this time."

"Man!" Quinan bellowed, taking the speaker at his word. "That's too warm for dead eyes! I tell you"—enraged, he stepped two paces away, and cracked his knuckles for emphasis—"as sure as a summer day is a live thing, *that canvas breathes!*"

Dabney drew a sharp breath. His lifeless eyes lighted. This from Quinan!

"Shown it anywhere?" inquired Quinan, falling back to the practical.

Once more Dabney drooped. On the tips of four fingers he counted off four French names, and finished with the thumb, and Goutran.

"Goutran, the pig!" snorted Quinan, supported by grunts from the others. "Well, what did he have to say about it?"

"A little less than usual, but snarlier and more insulting things, if that can be possible. He seemed more than ordinarily disgruntled—"

"But don't you know as well as the rest of us," thundered Quinan, "that Goutran buys for a crumb and sells for a loaf? He'll blur out your very name and smear another in—and off goes your treasure to South America, or farther!" Quinan's stiff bulk bent into caricature as he smacked his lips and flung a grotesque kiss in a vague direction. "Then, of course, it's good-by to you, as far as recognition goes!"

"But do you know Coppée?" the little Frenchman burst in, excitedly balancing on the tips of his pointed toes. "Coppée, who buys a picture as he could choose a pearl—who knows what has gone to the making of it—who pays what it is worth? Best of all, who makes the artist's name—if so he deserve—to be seen, to be heard—"

Benet's enthusiasm was cut short by Spencer, who also knew Coppée, and warmed to the idea.

"It will pay you to wait, Dabney. He returns to Paris in a month. As you value your life, old man, hang on to that square of sunlight."

Dabney shrugged, and spread his hands. His thought shot down to the gnawing sensation beneath his waistcoat.

"But how to keep going for a month?" he asked. "It takes more than two long legs and a willing heart!"

There ensued a puzzled moment of silence, which Quinan broke with his great voice.

"I've got it! Come with us to Renart. Spencer's going to unload some stuff on him—I'm not above it now and then myself. He sometimes pays in advance, too. Thank God for Renart!"

Dabney had never sunk so low as Renart—Renart, the one-eyed man, who kept the something-of-everything shop in the square of the Palais Royal. He often bought bits of water color—the same bits that all art students did, and do, and will do. Still, to keep his head above water until Coppée should return—



Spencer hailed a cab. He and Quinan together were good for the fare. They rattled the store of their pockets into the cups of their four hands.

"Tell me more of this Coppée," urged Dabney, sinking into the grateful softness of the back seat. "Tell me all about this incomparable person."

The men's words ran like music through his brain. If he sold this first picture to Renart, he could live for months on the proceeds, and already he was visualizing his second—"Sunrise in the Tuilleries Gardens." Under drooped lids, through thick lashes, he saw it as it should be—the tiny streak of red flowing along the edge of the east, interspersing the pale rose tree shafts with horizontal lines of flame; the gradual effulgence, as sky and leaf and tree and grass awakened.

The scraping of the cab against the curb jogged Dabney's eyes open. The shop they presently entered resembled most of the others in the square of decayed royalty that is still called the Palais Royal. It was grimy, narrow, with a suggestion of hollowness, yet, curiously, it was over-packed, like a badly filled cavity. As the one-eyed owner shifted toward them, stumblingly dodging a broken cabinet to crash into a portrait-littered table, Dabney wondered, scanning the dusty faces of a dozen sprawling saints, what manner of thing he could produce half bad enough to please this tawdry dealer.

"How about a corner of the Tour St. Jacques?" he ventured, as Renart's single lens focused upon him. "I can make it clear-cut, with a golden sun in the west or a red one in the east—or, better, a smiling crescent moon for luck; and all for the price of a quart of coffee and a yard or two of bread!"

Renart slumped before them, doubtful. His eye meditatively sought the farthest and grimmest corner of the shop.

"Some people like it best with a rain-bow behind," sang Quinan's booming tones, "like a slice of Berceaux's ice cream." He swung an arm toward the *pâtisserie* across the court. "Neapolitan effect, we call it. Try him, Renart. He's good. He's worth ten francs in advance."

With head hung sidewise, the dealer darted a suspicious glance at Quinan, then leveled a longer and more critical look at Dabney. At last he slipped a hand into a greasy pocket and brought forth eight

smooth francs and a number of grubby coppers, which, with apparent reluctance, he handed over.

Very lovingly Dabney regarded them. They would keep him on his feet—and more steadily than at present—until his intended atrocity became a colorful fact. One by one he dropped them into his pocket, and jingled them about. Turning to his friends, he plastered a large palm over the cavity of his stomach.

"Meet me at Messier's," he said. "I've a pressing engagement."

The others nodded comprehendingly.

"See you later," Quinan shouted, "if we're lucky!"

### III

WITH long, loose strides Dabney crossed the bridge. Rounding the corner of the first block, without any slackening of speed, he landed a copper, with a dull plunk, in the hollow of a blind beggar's hat. The sightless eyes thanked him.

Turning the corner of the second block, Messier's caught him by the nose—Messier's, with its pungent coffee and steaming *brioche*. Messier's was making a collection of his unpaid checks.

"*C'est la dernière fois, monsieur,*" had been Mme. Messier's little *hors d'œuvre* of two days ago. But what did that matter now? Dabney flipped his pocketed fingers, and chuckled. Then he strode into the little restaurant and up to the desk at the end of the narrow room.

"*Bon jour, madame!*" he cried breezily, smiling into two beady black eyes just discernible beneath much tousled false hair. "Look!" He drew the hand from his pocket. "Listen!" He closed the hand and shook it. "I can pay to-day!"

Quickly up and down, to betoken entire satisfaction, jerked the dark, frowzy head. *Madame* was fat—very fat. She labored up from the money drawer, rolled herself before him across the almost deserted room to his favorite table, and pulled out his special chair from beneath the spotted cloth. Then, with her own stubby hands, she brought him a smoking cup, a forearm's length of bread, and an omelette.

At the end of ten minutes Dabney repeated the order. His backbone felt tighter; he straightened out one leg, then the other, and gloried in their firmness. At last, and almost contentedly, he drew the napkin across his lips, and rose to go.

Stooping for his painting, a little dry sob from the direction of the corner table caught and held him. He turned, sharply.

As he did so, there was a sudden flutter, and a small, light-haired woman brushed aside the disordered dishes and dropped her pink face on the mottled tablecloth. The sob grew into a cry which strangled in her throat, and two pudgy hands groped among the dishes and decanters toward the helpless-looking object in the opposite chair.

As this object received, not eagerly, the hands thus stretched to him, Dabney, now a few steps nearer, recognized Henri Napoleon, a young, stringy waiter, not long in Mme. Messier's employ. Fish eyes, a spatulate nose, and a wabby mouth composed the features of the sodden face. Wrapped in a grimy apron, he resembled nothing so much as a worm in a dirty bandage. A long lock of dank hair, falling straight between his brows, served but to accentuate his unlikeness to his illustrious namesake.

It was evident that the waiter was not annoying the young woman, and quite as evident that he was the cause of her tears. It seemed equally clear to Dabney that this was *their* pie, and no concern for *his* finger; yet, somehow, the girl's appealing plumpness whispered to his chivalry. In two strides he was at her side.

Henri Napoleon shuffled to his long feet and stood at a corner of the board, drawing lines on the cloth with a dirty thumb nail. The girl raised her head and blinked the tears from her lashes. Her pink face grew pinker.

"Oh, *monsieur*!" she sighed, clasping the round little hands. Then, with no apparent thought that the stranger would understand her language, she proceeded, though haltingly, in his. "Sit down, if you please. It is that I must speak to some one—other than Henri."

At these words the waiter shot a sly look toward the kitchen, and turned as if to reach it with the greatest expedition; but the girl was quick. She caught at his apron strings and twisted him about.

"Stay there!" ordered Dabney, pointing to the young man's huge boots, as if Henri Napoleon might step out of them and be off.

The waiter sank to a chair near the young woman.

"You see, *monsieur*, my tears"—with

soft, short fingers she touched the swollen eyelids—"are because Henri, after all that have been between us, refuse to marry me!"

Thus, at a bound, Dabney found himself in the midst of their affair. Henri Napoleon, sheepish, with eyes not meeting his, seemed to perceive that the artist, as through a dirty glass, had read the past. The girl, with candid, helpless gaze, seemed trusting him to cipher out the future.

"And why," asked Dabney of her, though his eyes rested with sternness on the man, "has Henri refused to marry you?"

"Ah, *monsieur*!" Here the tears formed and fell again. "It is the matter of the money—the five hundred francs I promise him I should have!"

"Five hundred francs!" Dabney's hand slapped down on the table, and the dishes danced. He tried, with his own eyes, to meet the soggy optics of the waiter shifting about under their limp lashes. "You—you worm!"

But Henri Napoleon said nothing.

"Speak up, man—if you *are* one! Don't you love the girl enough to marry her without a *sou*? If you don't, you don't know what love is!"

"Oh, *monsieur*, you are mistaken!" The girl's voice breathed in his direction, while tenderness took the place of tears in her eyes. "You are mistake. Henri know what love is. Henri is love!"

At another time the thought of Henri Napoleon in the rôle of Cupid might have proved too much for Dabney's imagination; but a look at the girl held his mind to her immediate need. He leaned toward her. He felt a sudden yearning to take the round little hands in his own.

"My dear young woman," he asked softly, "do you think that five hundred francs—five *thousand* francs—could *buy* love?"

"They could buy Henri. That is enough, *monsieur*."

She sent toward the waiter a look so heavy with adoration that Dabney, gazing on its smirking, slimy recipient, could scarce restrain his twitching hands. He felt a soft pressure on his arm, and in a still more tender tone the girl added:

"Besides, *monsieur*—there is to think of—another. He must—when he is come—have a name. It is for this that my father—when he know—refuse the money."

For the first time the slippery lips of the waiter parted in speech.

"That is why we *must* have it—the money. Five hundred francs is cheap—for a name!" Almost squarely he met Dabney's eyes. His general stringiness drew into a rigid line. His lips loosened over sharp yellow teeth, like a beast's. "Not a *sou* less!" He barked the words at Dabney.

"Not a *sou* less!"

Silently Dabney repeated the phrase. What were those words trying to call from his memory?

Suddenly he sat straight, and jerked his head toward the painting which he had left leaning against the table across the room. Goutran, the pig! It was Goutran's snarling voice he heard, and Goutran's insult that rang in his head in words so nearly identical:

"Five hundred francs for it—not a *sou* more!"

Again Dabney slouched—and smiled.

Five hundred francs for—what?

Five hundred francs for—a *name*. Henri Napoleon had said it; and cheap at that.

A name! Well, was it not for a name that he had mixed his paints, the best, perhaps, that he would ever mix—that he had sat, noontime after noontime, alone in the deserted heat of the Luxembourg Garden—that he had caught, at last, one baking, shining hour, and made it his?

Abruptly he rose. He touched a hand to the girl's soft shoulder.

"Wait," he said. "Wait!" he repeated, a little more sternly, to the staring Henri Napoleon.

He stepped to the canvas, gently placed it under an arm, and set his long legs moving.

#### IV

HALF an hour later, as unostentatiously as possible, Dabney handed over the shining dower. The little bride, all pudgy smile, stretched up and left a kiss near her benefactor's ear.

Then, suddenly, the place became crowded with the presence of his three friends—Quinan's booming voice, Benet's light, high-pitched enthusiasm, and Spencer's hearty normality.

"Just met Sophie and her faithless Napoleon," roared Quinan, "prancing for the priest!"

"Ah! So her name is Sophie?" Dabney passed them, making for the door. "I might have guessed it—a soft, sweet, weak little name!"

"But how in the name of everything," blared Quinan, "did such a pig of a father come by such a—"

"Pig of a father?" Dabney turned to stare. "You mean—you don't mean—"

"Goutran, of course," said Spencer. "Didn't you know that—"

Something in Dabney's face stopped him.

"Not going, old chap?" Quinan swung an arm and curved a huge palm over the artist's shoulder. "Well, let's have one more squint at the masterpiece first!"

"The masterpiece," Dabney brought out thickly, and with crimsoning cheeks, "is not due—yet."

#### YOU

You make me think of all the lovely things  
That God has made.  
The azure hue of summer skies;  
The oak tree's shade;

A crystal psalm high-flung by soaring lark;  
A pansy's face;  
The harp-sweet humming of the pines;  
A sunny place.

These are the things that please the poet soul—  
The magic clew  
That led my heart to find, dear love,  
These things in you!

Lilian Nicholson

# Timeworn Town

## THE STORY OF THE STRANGE MURDER MYSTERY IN HISTORIC HATHELSBOROUGH

By J. S. Fletcher

Author of "The Town of Crooked Ways," "The Harvest Moon," etc.

**R**ICHARD BRENT, a London newspaper man, comes to Hathelsborough to visit his cousin, John Wallingford, mayor of the old north country town. Bunning, caretaker of the Moot Hall, takes him upstairs to the mayor's office, where the two men are shocked to find Wallingford dead at his desk, stabbed through the body. In the room are two possible clues to the murderer—a cambric handkerchief, blood-stained and half burned, in the fireplace, and a long, sharp rapier thrown behind a bookcase.

Brent suspects that the murder was due to political reasons, as Wallingford had incurred much hostility on account of his efforts to sweep away certain long-standing abuses in the government of the old borough. He interviews Alderman Simon Crood, leader of the conservative party in Hathelsborough, and Crood's henchmen, Mallett and Coppinger, but without result, although he finds an ally in Queenie Crood, a young girl who is the alderman's niece and housekeeper. Simon Crood has a brother, Krevin Crood, who draws an unearned pension from the borough—a typical instance of the "graft" that the late mayor sought to abolish.

Determined to solve the mystery of his cousin's murder, and, if he can, to carry on Wallingford's work for reform, Brent buys a house in Hathelsborough and announces himself as a candidate for the seat in the town council left vacant by the late mayor's death.

At the coroner's inquest, Hawthwaite, the superintendent of police, brings forward evidence which seems to cast suspicion on Dr. Wellesley, the police surgeon. A possible motive for the crime is disclosed in the fact that both Wallingford and Wellesley were ardent admirers of an attractive young widow, Mrs. Saumarez, who admits on the witness stand that there was jealousy between the two men. Dr. Carstairs, the police surgeon's assistant, testifies that Wellesley left his surgery—a back room of his house, which adjoins the Moot Hall—just about the time of the murder, and was absent for several minutes.

Cotman, Dr. Wellesley's lawyer, now intervenes to protect his client.

### XV

**C**OTMAN turned to Carstairs, who had lingered in the witness box during this exchange between the coroner and Dr. Wellesley's lawyer.

"Dr. Carstairs," he began, "you say that after being away from his surgery for nineteen minutes on the evening of Mr. Wallingford's death, Dr. Wellesley came back to you there?"

"Yes," answered Carstairs. "Yes—that is so."

"Was any one with you in the surgery when he returned?"

"No—no one."

"You were alone with him, until he went out again to the appointment in Meadow Gate?"

"Yes, quite alone."

"So you had abundant opportunity of observing him. Did he seem at all excited or flurried? Did you notice anything unusual in his manner?"

"I did not. He was just himself."

"Quite calm and normal?"

"Quite."

"Didn't give you the impression that he had just been going through any particularly moving or trying episode, such as murdering a fellow creature?"

"He did not," replied Carstairs, without the ghost of a smile. "He was just as usual."

"When did you see him next, after he went out to keep the appointment in Meadow Gate?"

"About half past eight, or a little later."

"Where?"

"At the mortuary. He sent for me. I

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went to the mortuary, and found him there with Dr. Barber. They were making an examination of the dead man, and wanted my help."

"Was Dr. Wellesley excited or upset then?"

"He was not. He seemed to me—I'm speaking professionally, mind you—remarkably cool."

Cotman suddenly sat down, and turned to his client with a smile on his lips. Evidently he made some cynical remark to Wellesley, for Wellesley smiled, too.

"Smart chap, Cotman!" whispered Tansley to Brent. "That bit of cross-examination will tell with the jury. Now, what next?"

Bunning, recalled from the previous sitting, came next—merely to repeat that the mayor went up to his parlor at twenty-five minutes past seven, and that he and Mr. Brent found his worship dead just after eight o'clock.

Following him came Dr. Barber, who testified that when he first saw Wallingford's dead body, just about a quarter past eight, he came to the conclusion that death had taken place about forty-five minutes previously, or perhaps a little less. And from him Cotman drew evidence that Wellesley, in the examination at the mortuary, was normal, calm, and collected—and, Dr. Barber added of his own will, greatly annoyed and horrified at the murder.

Brent was beginning to get sick of this new development. To him it seemed idle and purposeless. He whispered as much to Tansley; but Tansley shook his head.

"Can't say that," he replied. "Where was Wellesley during that nineteen minutes' absence from the surgery? He'll have to explain that, anyway. They'll have more evidence than what we've heard. Hello, here's Walkershaw, the borough surveyor! What are they going to get out of him, I wonder?"

Brent watched an official-looking person make his way to the witness box. He was armed with a quantity of rolls of drawing paper, and was accompanied by a clerk, whose duty, it presently appeared, was to act as a living easel and hold up these things, diagrams and outlines, while his principal explained them.

Presently the eager audience found itself listening to what was neither more nor less than a lecture on the architecture of Hathelsborough Moot Hall and its immediately

adjacent buildings. Then, of course, Brent began to see the drift of the borough surveyor's evidence.

The whole block of masonry between Copper Alley and Piper's Passage, testified Walkershaw, illustrating his observations by pointing to the large diagram held on high by his clerk, was extremely ancient. In it there were three separate buildings—separate, that was, in their use, but standing together like one structure.

First, next to Copper Alley, which ran out of Meadow Gate, came the big house long used as a bank. Then came the Moot Hall itself. Next, between the Moot Hall and Piper's Passage, which was a narrow entry between River Gate and St. Laurence Lane, stood Dr. Wellesley's house. Until comparatively recent times this had been the official residence of the mayor of Hathelsborough; and between it and the Moot Hall there was a definite means of communication—in short, a private door.

There was a general pricking of ears upon this announcement. Tansley, at Brent's side, indulged in a low whistle. He saw the full significance of Walkershaw's statement.

"Another link in the chain, Brent!" he muttered. "'Pon my word, they're putting it together rather cleverly! Nineteen minutes' absence—door between his house and the Moot Hall—come!"

Brent made no comment. He was closely following the borough surveyor as that worthy pointed out on his plans and diagrams the means of communication between the Moot Hall and the old dwelling house at its side.

In former days, said Walkershaw, some mayor of Hathelsborough had caused a door to be made in a certain small room in the house. That door opened on a passage in the Moot Hall which led to the corridor wherein the mayor's parlor was situated. It had no doubt been used by many occupants of the mayoral chair during their term of office. Of late, however, nobody seemed to have known of it; but the borough surveyor, having examined it, for the purposes of this inquiry, during the last day or two, had found that it showed unmistakable signs of recent usage. In fact, the lock and bolts had quite recently been oiled.

The evidence of this witness came to a dramatic end in the shape of a question from the coroner.

"How long would it take, then, for any person to go by this private passage from Dr. Wellesley's house to the mayor's parlor in the Moot Hall?"

"One minute," replied Walkershaw promptly. "If anything, less than that."

Cotman, who had been whispering with his client during the borough surveyor's evidence, asked no questions; and presently the interest of the court shifted to a little shrewd-faced, self-possessed woman who tripped into the witness box and admitted cheerfully that she was Mrs. Marriner, proprietor of Marriner's Laundry, and that she washed for several of the best families in Hathelsborough. The fragment of handkerchief which had been found in the mayor's parlor was handed to her for inspection, and the coroner asked her if she could say definitely whether she knew whose it was. There was considerable doubt and skepticism in his voice as he put the question, but Mrs. Marriner showed herself the incarnation of sure and positive conviction.

"Yes, sir," she answered. "It's Dr. Wellesley's."

"You must wash a great many handkerchiefs at your laundry, Mrs. Marriner," observed the coroner. "How can you be sure about one—about that one?"

"I'm sure enough about that one, sir, because it's one of a dozen that's gone through my hands many a time," asserted Mrs. Marriner. "There's nobody in the town, sir—leastways not among my customers, and I wash for all the very best people, sir—that has any handkerchiefs like them, except Dr. Wellesley. They're the very finest French cambric. That there is a piece of one of the doctor's best handkerchiefs, sir, as sure as I'm in this here box—which I wish I wasn't!"

The coroner asked nothing further. He was plainly impatient about the handkerchief evidence, if not wholly skeptical, and he waved Mrs. Marriner away; but Cotman stopped her.

"I suppose, Mrs. Marriner, that mistakes are sometimes made when you and your assistants send home the clean clothes?" he suggested. "Things get in the wrong baskets, eh?"

"Well, not often, at my place, sir," replied Mrs. Marriner. "We're always very careful."

"Still—sometimes, you know?"

"Oh, I'll not say that they don't sometimes, sir," admitted Mrs. Marriner.

"We're all of us human creatures, as you're very well aware, sir."

"This particular handkerchief may have got into a wrong basket?" urged Cotman. "It's possible?"

"Oh, it's possible, sir," said Mrs. Marriner. "Mistakes will happen, sir."

Mrs. Marriner disappeared among the crowd, and a new witness took her place. She, too, was a woman—a young and pretty one, and in a tearful and nervous condition. Tansley glanced at her and turned with a significant glance to Brent.

"Great Scott!" he whispered. "Wellesley's housemaid!"

## XVI

INTEREST was beginning to thicken. The people in court, from Simon Crood, pompous and aloof in his new grandeur of chief magistrate, to Spizey the bellman, equally pompous in his ancient livery, were already open-mouthed with wonder at the new and startling development; but the sudden advent of the young and pretty domestic, whose tears betrayed her unwillingness to come forward, deepened the interest still further. Everybody leaned forward toward the center of the court, intent on hearing what the girl had to tell.

She paid no attention to these manifestations of inquisitiveness. Standing in the witness box, a tear-soaked handkerchief in her hands, half sullen, half resentful of mouth and eye, she looked at nobody but the coroner. Her whole expression was that of a defenseless animal, pinned in a corner and watchful of its captor.

This time it was not the coroner who put questions to the witness. There had been some whispering between him, Hawthwaite, and Meeking, the barrister who represented the police authorities; and it was Meeking who turned to the reluctant girl and began to get her information from her by means of bland, suavely expressed, half suggesting interrogatories.

Winifred Wilson—twenty years of age—housemaid at Dr. Wellesley's—been in the doctor's employ about fourteen months.

"Did you give certain information to the police recently?" inquired Meeking, going straight to his point, as soon as these preliminaries were over. "Information bearing on the matter now being inquired into?"

"Yes, sir," replied the witness in a low voice.

"Was it relating to something that you saw in Dr. Wellesley's house, on the evening on which Mr. Wallingford was found dead in the mayor's parlor?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was it that you saw?"

The girl hesitated. Evidently on the verge of a fresh outburst of tears, she compressed her nether lip, looking fixedly at the ledge of the witness box.

"Don't be afraid," said Meeking. "We only want the truth. Tell that, and you've nothing to be afraid of or to reproach yourself with. Now what did you see?"

The girl's answer came in a whisper:

"I saw Dr. Wellesley."

"You saw your master, Dr. Wellesley. Where did you see Dr. Wellesley?"

"On the hall staircase, sir."

"On the hall staircase. That, I suppose, is the main staircase of the house? Very well! Now where were you?"

"Up on the top landing, sir."

"What were you doing there?"

"I'd just come out of my room, sir. I'd been getting dressed to go out."

"And how came you to see your master on the staircase?"

"I heard a door open on the landing below, sir, and I just looked over the banister, to see who it was."

"Who was it?"

"Dr. Wellesley, sir."

"What was he doing?"

"He'd just come out of the drawing-room door, sir."

"Are you sure he had come out of that particular door?"

"Well, sir, I saw him close it behind him."

"What happened then?"

"He stood still for a minute, sir, on the landing."

"Doing anything?"

"No, sir—just standing."

"And what then?"

"He went downstairs, sir."

"And disappeared?"

"He went toward the surgery, sir."

"How was the staircase lighted when you saw all this?"

"Well, sir, there was a light in the hall, at the foot of the staircase, and there was another light on the drawing-room floor landing."

"Then you could see Dr. Wellesley quite clearly?"

"Yes, sir."

"How was he dressed?"

"He had his surgery jacket on, sir—a white linen jacket."

"You saw Dr. Wellesley quite clearly, wearing a white linen jacket, and coming out of the drawing-room door. Now I want to ask you about the drawing-room. Is there another room opening out of Dr. Wellesley's drawing-room?"

"Yes, sir."

"How big is it?"

"It's a little room. Not very big, sir."

"What is it used for? What is there in it, now?"

"Nothing much, sir—some bookcases, and a desk, and a chair or two."

"Is there a door on its farther side—the side next to the Moot Hall?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you ever seen it open?"

"No, sir, never."

"You don't know where it gives access to, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"Might be a cupboard door, eh?"

"I always thought it was a cupboard door, sir."

"Very good! Now I want you to be very particular about answering my next question. What time was it when you saw Dr. Wellesley come out of his drawing-room door?"

"It would be just about a quarter to eight, sir."

"Are you quite sure about that?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Did anything fix the time on your mind?"

"Yes, sir—at least, I heard the clocks strike the quarter, just after—the Moot Hall clock, sir, and the parish church."

"You're sure it was a quarter to eight o'clock that you heard?"

"Yes, sir, quite sure."

"Why are you quite sure?"

The witness reddened a little, and looked shyly aside.

"Well, sir, I had to meet somebody, outside the house, at a quarter to eight o'clock," she murmured.

"I see! Did you meet him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Punctually?"

"I might have been a minute late, sir. The clocks had done striking."

"Very good! And just before they began to strike you saw Dr. Wellesley come out of his drawing-room door?"

"Yes, sir."

Meeking suddenly dropped back into his seat and began to shuffle his papers. The coroner glanced at Cotman. Cotman, with a cynical smile, got to his feet and confronted the witness.

"Was it your young man that you went out to meet at a quarter to eight o'clock that evening?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," admitted the girl.

"What's his name?"

"Joe Green, sir."

"Did you tell Joe Green that you had just seen Dr. Wellesley come out of his drawing-room?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because I didn't think anything of it, sir."

"You didn't think anything of it! And pray when did you begin to think something of it?"

"Well, sir, it was—it was when the police began asking questions."

"And of whom did they ask questions?"

"Me and the other servants, sir."

"Dr. Wellesley's servants?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many servants does Dr. Wellesley keep?"

"Four, sir, and a boy."

"So the police came asking questions about Dr. Wellesley, did they? What about him?"

"Well, sir, it was about what we knew of Dr. Wellesley's movements on that evening, sir—where he was from half past seven to eight o'clock. Then I remembered, sir."

"And told the police?"

"No, sir—not then. I said nothing to anybody, at first."

"But you did later on. Now, to whom?"

The witness here began to show more signs of tearfulness.

"Don't cry!" said Cotman. "To whom did you first mention this?"

"Well, sir, it was to Mrs. Lane. I got so upset about it that I told her."

"Who is Mrs. Lane?"

"She's the lady that looks after the Girls' Friendly Society, sir."

"Are you a member of that?"

"Yes, sir."

"So you went and told Mrs. Lane all about it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did Mrs. Lane say?"

"She said I must tell Mr. Hawthwaite, sir."

"Did she take you to Mr. Hawthwaite?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you told him all that you have told us now?"

"Yes, sir—Mrs. Lane said I must."

"You didn't want to, eh?"

Here the girl burst into tears. Cotman turned to the coroner.

"I have no further questions to put to this witness, sir," he said; "but I would make a respectful suggestion to yourself. I urge that my client, Dr. Wellesley, should be called at once. We know now that the police have been secretly working up a case against Dr. Wellesley—in fact, I am very much surprised that they have not gone to the length of arresting him. Perhaps that's a card which Superintendent Hawthwaite still keeps up his sleeve. I may tell him, on behalf of my client, that he's quite welcome to arrest Dr. Wellesley and bring him before the magistrates whenever he likes; but as Dr. Wellesley's name has been very freely mentioned this morning, I think it would be only fair, sir, that he should be allowed to go into that box at once, where he will give evidence on oath—"

"If Dr. Wellesley elects to go into the box," interrupted the coroner, "I shall, of course, warn him in the usual way, Mr. Cotman. He is not bound to give any evidence that might incriminate himself; but no doubt you have already made him aware of that."

"Dr. Wellesley is very well aware of it, sir," replied Cotman. "I ask that he should be allowed to give evidence at once."

"Let Dr. Wellesley be called, then," said the coroner.

Brent inspected Wellesley closely as the surgeon stepped into the witness box. He was a well set up, handsome man, noted in the town for his correct and fashionable attire, and he made quite a distinguished figure as the center of these somewhat sordid surroundings.

That he was indignant was very obvious. He answered the preliminary questions impatiently. There was impatience, too, in his manner, as, after taking the oath, he turned to the coroner. It seemed to Brent that Wellesley's notion was that the point-blank denial of a man of honor was enough to dispose of any charge.

This time the coroner went to work himself, quietly and confidentially.



"Dr. Wellesley," he began, leaning over his desk, "I need not warn you in the way I mentioned just now. I'm sure you quite understand the position. As you have been in court all the morning, you have heard the evidence that has already offered itself. As regards the evidence given by your assistant, Dr. Carstairs, as to your absence from the surgery between seven thirty and seven forty-nine—is that correct?"

Wellesley drew himself to his full height, and spoke with emphasis.

"Absolutely!"

"And the evidence of the young woman, your housemaid? Is she correct in what she told us?"

"Quite!"

The coroner looked down at his papers, his spectacled eyes wandering about them as if in search of something. Suddenly he looked up.

"There's this matter of the handkerchief, or portion of a handkerchief," he said. "It was picked up, we are told, from the hearth in the mayor's parlor, where the rest of it had been burned. Did you hear Mrs. Marriner's evidence about that, Dr. Wellesley?"

"I did."

"Is what she said, or suggested, correct? Is the handkerchief yours?"

"I have never seen the handkerchief—or, rather, the remains of it. I heard that some portion of a handkerchief, charred and blood-stained, was found lying on the hearth in the mayor's parlor, and that it had been handed over to Superintendent Hawthwaite, but I have not had it shown to me."

The coroner glanced at Hawthwaite, who, since the opening of the court, had sat near Meeking, occasionally exchanging whispered remarks.

"Let Dr. Wellesley see that fragment," he said.

All eyes were fixed on the witness as he took the piece of charred and faintly stained stuff in his hands, and examined it. Everybody knew that the stain was from the blood of the murdered man. The same thought was in everybody's mind—was that stain now being critically inspected by the actual murderer?

Wellesley suddenly looked up. At the same time he handed back the fragment to the policeman who had passed it to him.

"To the best of my belief," he said, turning to the coroner, "that is part of a hand-

kerchief of mine. The handkerchief was one of a dozen which I bought in Paris about a year ago."

A murmur ran round the crowded court at this candid avowal. As it died away, the coroner again spoke.

"Had you missed this handkerchief?"

"I had not. I have a drawer in my dressing room full of handkerchiefs—several dozens of them; but I am positive, from the texture, that that is mine."

"Very well!" said the coroner. "Now, about the evidence of Mr. Walkershaw. Did you know of the door between your house and the Moot Hall?"

"Yes, and so did the late mayor. As a matter of fact, he and I, some time ago, had it put to rights. We both used it—I, to go into the Moot Hall; he, to come and see me."

"There was no secrecy about it, then?"

"Not between Wallingford and myself, at any rate."

The coroner took off his spectacles and leaned back in his chair—a sure sign that he had finished his questions. Meeking rose, cool, level-voiced.

"Dr. Wellesley, I think you heard the evidence of Mrs. Saumarez?"

But before Dr. Wellesley could make answer, the other doctors present in the court room were suddenly called into action. As the barrister pronounced her name, Mrs. Saumarez collapsed in her seat, fainting.

## XVII

IN the midst of the commotion that followed, and while Mrs. Saumarez, attended by the doctors, was being carried out of the court room, Tansley, at Brent's elbow, drew in his breath with a sharp sibilant sound that came near being a whistle. Brent turned from the withdrawing figures to look at him questioningly.

"Well?" he said.

"Queer!" muttered Tansley. "Why should she faint? I wonder—"

"What?" demanded Brent, as the solicitor paused.

"I'm wondering if she and Wellesley know anything that they're keeping to themselves," said Tansley. "She was obviously nervous and frightened when she was in that box just now."

"She's a nervous, highly strung woman, I should say, from what I've seen of her," remarked Brent. "Excitable!"

"Well, he's cool enough," said Tansley, nodding toward the witness box. "Hasn't turned a hair! Meeking will get nothing out of him!"

The barrister was again addressing himself to Wellesley, who, after one glance at Mrs. Saumarez as she fainted, had remained erect and defiant, facing the court.

"You heard Mrs. Saumarez's evidence just now, Dr. Wellesley?" asked Meeking quietly.

"I did."

"Was it correct?"

"I am not going to discuss it."

"Nor answer any questions arising out of it?"

"I am not."

"Perhaps you will answer some questions of mine. Was there any jealousy existing between you and the late John Wallingford, of which Mrs. Saumarez was the cause?"

Wellesley hesitated, taking a full minute for consideration.

"I will answer that to a certain extent," he replied at last. "At the time of his death, no—none!"

"Had there been any previously?"

"At one time—yes. It was over."

"You and he were good friends?"

"Absolutely, both in private and public—I mean in public affairs. I was in complete touch and sympathy with him as regards his public work."

"Now, Dr. Wellesley, I think that for your own sake you ought to give us some information on one or two points. Mrs. Saumarez said on oath that you asked her to marry you, two or three times. She also said that the late mayor asked her, too. Now—"

Wellesley suddenly brought down his hand on the ledge of the witness box.

"I have already told you, sir, that I am not going to discuss my affairs with Mrs. Saumarez, or with the late mayor in relation to Mrs. Saumarez!" he exclaimed, with some show of anger. "They are private, and have nothing to do with this inquiry. I shall not answer any question relating to them."

"In that case, Dr. Wellesley, you will lay yourself open to whatever conclusions the jury may choose to make," said Meeking. "We have already heard Mrs. Saumarez say—what she did say; but as you won't answer, I will pass to another matter. You have already told us that the evi-

dence of your assistant, Dr. Carstairs, is correct as to your movements between half past seven and eleven minutes to eight—or, rather, as to your absence from the surgery during those nineteen minutes. You adhere to that?"

"Certainly. Carstairs is quite correct."

"Very well! Where were you during that time—nineteen minutes?"

"For most of the time, I was in my drawing-room."

"What do you mean by 'most of the time'?"

"Well, I should say three-quarters of it."

"And the other quarter?"

"Spent in letting a caller in and letting that caller out."

"By your front door?"

"No, by a side door—a private door."

"You took this caller to your drawing-room, then?"

"Yes."

"For a private interview?"

"Precisely."

Meeking allowed a minute to elapse, during which he affected to be looking at his papers. Suddenly he turned full on his witness.

"Who was the caller?"

Wellesley drew his tall figure still more erect.

"I refuse to say."

"Why?"

"Because I am not going to drag in the name of my caller. The business my caller came upon was of a very private and confidential nature, and I am not going to break my rule of professional silence. I shall not give the name."

Meeking again paused. Finally, with a glance at the coroner, he turned to the witness and began to speak more earnestly.

"Let me put this to you," he said.

"Consider calmly, if you please, what we have heard from previous witnesses, and what you yourself have admitted. Mrs. Saumarez has sworn that you and the late mayor were rivals for her hand, and that there was jealousy between you. You admit that Mrs. Marriner is correct in identifying the burned and blood-stained fragment of handkerchief found in the mayor's parlor after the murder as your property. You also acknowledge the existence of a door communicating between your house and the Moot Hall. You admit that you were away from your surgery for nineteen minutes at the very time when the murder

was committed, according to the medical evidence. You admit that you were in your drawing-room, from an inner room of which the door I have just referred to opens. Now I suggest to you, Dr. Wellesley, that you should give us the name of the person who was with you in your drawing-room."

Wellesley, who, during this exordium, had steadily watched his questioner, shook his head more decidedly than before.

"No!" he answered promptly. "I shall not say who my caller was."

Meeking spread out his hands in a gesture of helplessness. He turned to the coroner, who, for the last few minutes, had shown signs of being ill at ease, and had frequently shaken his head at Wellesley's point-blank refusals.

"I don't know if it is any use appealing to you, sir," said Meeking. "The witness is—"

The coroner leaned toward Wellesley, his whole attitude placatory and inviting.

"I really think that it would be better, doctor, if you could find it in your way to answer Mr. Meeking's question."

"I have answered it, sir," interrupted Wellesley. "My answer is—no!"

"Yes, yes, but I don't want the jury to get any false impressions—to draw any wrong conclusions," said the coroner, a little testily. "I feel sure that in your own interest—"

"I am not thinking of my own interest," declared Wellesley. "Once again, I shall not give the name of my caller."

There was a further pause, during which Meeking and the coroner exchanged glances. Then the lawyer suddenly turned again to the witness box.

"Was your caller a man or a woman?" he asked.

"That I shan't say," answered Wellesley steadily.

"Who admitted him—or her?"

"I did."

"How? By what door of your house?"

"By the side door in Piper's Passage."

"Did any of your servants see the caller at the door?"

"No."

"How came that about? You have several servants."

"My caller came to that door by arrangement with myself at a certain time—seven thirty—was admitted by me, and taken straight up to my drawing-room by

a side staircase. My caller left, when the interview was over, by the same way."

"The interview, then, was a secret one?"

"Precisely. It was secret—private—confidential."

"And you flatly refuse to give us the caller's name?"

"Flatly."

Meeking hesitated a moment. Then, with a sudden gesture, as if he washed his hands of the whole episode, he dropped back into his seat, bundled his papers together, and made some evidently cynical remark to Hawthwaite, who sat near to him.

Hawthwaite made no response. He was watching the coroner, and in answer to a questioning glance he shook his head.

"No more evidence," whispered Tansley to Brent, as Wellesley, dismissed, stepped down from the witness box. "Whew! This is a queer business, and our non-responsive medical friend may come to rue his obstinacy. I wonder what old Sea-grave will make of it! He'll have to sum it all up now."

### VIII

THE coroner was already turning to the jury. He began with his notes of the first day's proceedings, and spent some time over them; but eventually he told his listeners that all that had transpired in the opening stages of the inquiry faded into comparative insignificance when viewed in the light of the evidence they had heard that morning. He analyzed that evidence with the acumen of the shrewd old lawyer that everybody knew him to be.

At last he got to what the sharper intellects among his hearers felt, with him, to be the crux of the situation—was there jealousy of an appreciable nature between Wallingford and Wellesley in respect to Mrs. Saumarez? If there was—and he rather cavalierly brushed aside Wellesley's denial that it existed at the time of Wallingford's death, estimating that denial lightly in face of the fact that its cause was still there, and that Wellesley had admitted that it had existed at one time—then the evidence, as they had it, clearly showed that between seven thirty and seven forty-nine on the evening of the late mayor's death, Wellesley had ready and easy means of access to the mayor's parlor.

Something might have occurred, the coroner suggested, which had revived the old

jealousy. There might have been a sudden scene, a quarrel, high words. It was a pity, a thousand pities, that Dr. Wellesley refused to give the name of the person who, according to his story, was with him during the nineteen minutes' interval which—

"Going dead against him!" whispered Tansley to Brent. "The old chap's taken Meeking's job out of his hands. Good thing this is a coroner's court. If a judge said as much as Seagrave's saying to an assize jury, Wellesley would hang! Look at those jurymen—they're half dead certain that Wellesley's guilty already!"

"Well," muttered Brent, "I'm not so far off that stage myself. Why didn't he speak out, and be done with it? There's been more in that love affair than I guessed at, Tansley—that's where it is. The woman's anxious enough, anyway—look at her!"

Mrs. Saumarez had come back into court. She looked very pale, and was evidently under great excitement. It seemed to Brent that she was almost holding her breath as the old coroner, in his slow, carefully measured accents and phrases, went on piling up the damning conclusions that might be drawn against Wellesley.

"You must not allow yourselves to forget, gentlemen," he was saying, "that Dr. Wellesley's assertion that he was busy with a caller during the fateful nineteen minutes is wholly uncorroborated. There are several domestic servants in his establishment—four or five, I think. There was also his assistant in the house, and there were patients going in and out of the surgery, but no one has been brought forward to prove that he was engaged with a visitor in his drawing-room. Now you are only concerned with the evidence that has been put before you, and I am bound to tell you that there is no evidence that Dr. Wellesley had any caller—"

A woman's voice suddenly rang out, clear and sharp, from a point of the audience immediately facing the coroner.

"He had! I was the caller!"

In the excitement of the moment, Tansley sprang to his feet, stared, and sank back again.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Mrs. Mallett! Whew!"

Brent, too, got up and looked. He saw a handsome, determined-looking woman standing amid the closely packed spectators. Mallett, the bank manager, sat by

her side. He was evidently struck dumb with sudden amazement, and was staring open-mouthed at her. On the other side, two or three men and women, evidently friends, were expostulating with the interrupter; but Mrs. Mallett was oblivious of her husband's wonder and her friends' entreaties. Confronting the coroner, she spoke again.

"Mr. Seagrave, I am the person who called on Dr. Wellesley!" she said in a loud, clear voice. "I was there all the time you're discussing, and if you'll let me give evidence, you shall have it on my oath. I am not going to sit here and hear an innocent man traduced for lack of a word of mine."

The coroner, who looked none too well pleased at this interruption, motioned Mrs. Mallett to come forward. He impatiently waved aside a protest from Wellesley, who seemed to be begging this voluntary witness to go back to her seat and say nothing. Then, as Mrs. Mallett entered the witness box, Seagrave turned to Meeking.

"Perhaps you'll be good enough to examine this witness," he said, a little irritably. "These irregular interruptions—but let her say what she has to say."

Mrs. Mallett, in Brent's opinion, looked precisely the sort of lady to have her say, and to have it right out. She was calm enough now, and, when she had taken the oath and told her questioner formally who she was, she faced him with equanimity. Meeking, somewhat uncertain of his ground, took his cue from the witness's dramatic intervention.

"Mrs. Mallett, did you call on Dr. Wellesley at seven thirty on the evening in question—the evening on which Mr. Wallingford met his death?"

"I did."

"By arrangement?"

"Certainly—by arrangement."

"When was the arrangement made?"

"That afternoon. Dr. Wellesley and I met in the Market Place, about four o'clock. We made it then."

"Was the interview to be a strictly private one?"

"Yes, it was. That was why I went to the side door in Piper's Passage."

"Did Dr. Wellesley admit you to the house himself?"

"Yes, he did, and he took me straight up to his drawing-room by a side staircase."

"No one saw you going in?"



"No—nor leaving, either."

"Why all this privacy, Mrs. Mallett?"

"My business was of a private sort, sir."

"Will you tell us what it was?"

"I will tell you that I had reasons of my own—my particular own—for seeing Dr. Wellesley and the mayor."

"The mayor! Did you see the mayor—there?"

"No. I meant to see him, but I didn't."

"Do you mean that you expected to meet him there—in Dr. Wellesley's drawing-room?"

"No. Dr. Wellesley had told me of the door between his house and the Moot Hall, and he said that after he and I had had our talk, I could go through that door to the mayor's parlor, where I should be sure to find Mr. Wallingford at that time."

"I see! Did you go to see the late Mr. Wallingford?"

"I did."

"After talking with Dr. Wellesley?"

"Yes. He showed me the way, and opened the door for me—"

"Stay—what time would that be?"

"About seven thirty-five or so. I went along the passage to the mayor's parlor, but I never entered."

"Never entered! And why, now, Mrs. Mallett?"

"Because, as I reached the door, I heard people talking inside the room; so I went back the way I came."

### XIX

MEEKING, who, by long experience, knew the value of dramatic effect in the examination of witnesses, took full advantage of Mrs. Mallett's strange and unexpected announcement. He paused, staring at her. He knew well enough that when he stared, other folk would stare, too.

So for a full moment the situation rested. There stood Mrs. Mallett, resolute and unmoved, in the box, with every eye in the crowded court fixed full upon her, and Meeking still gazing at her intently—and, of set purpose, half incredulously. There was something intentionally skeptical and cynical in his tone, when at last he spoke.

"Do you say—on oath—that you went through the door between Dr. Wellesley's house and Moot Hall, to the mayor's parlor, that evening?"

"To the door of the mayor's parlor," corrected Mrs. Mallett. "Yes—I do—I did."

"Was the door closed?"

"The door was closed."

"But you say you heard voices?"

"I heard voices within."

"Whose voices?"

"That I can't say. I couldn't distinguish them."

"Did you hear the mayor's voice?"

"I tell you I couldn't distinguish any voice. There were two people talking inside the mayor's parlor, anyway, in loud voices. It seemed to me that they were both talking at the same time. In fact, I thought—"

"What did you think?" demanded Meeking, as Mrs. Mallett paused.

"Well, I thought that, whoever they were, the two people were quarreling. The voices were loud—lifted—angry, I thought."

"And yet you couldn't distinguish them?"

"No, I couldn't. I might have recognized the mayor's voice, perhaps, if I'd gone closer to the door and listened, but I didn't stay. As soon as I heard what I have told you of, I went straight back."

"By the same way—to Dr. Wellesley's drawing-room?"

"Yes."

"What happened then?"

"I told Dr. Wellesley that the mayor had somebody with him, and that they appeared to be having high words. As I didn't want to wait, he suggested that I should come again next evening. Then I went home."

"In the same way—by the private door into Piper's Passage?"

"Exactly."

"Did Dr. Wellesley go downstairs with you and let you out?"

"He did."

"See anybody about on that occasion?"

"No—one."

Meeking paused. After a glance around the table at which he was standing, he looked at his notes.

"Now, Mrs. Mallett," he said presently, "what time was this—I mean, when you left Dr. Wellesley's?"

"A little before a quarter to eight. The clock struck the quarter just after I got into my own house."

"Where is your house?"

"Next door to the Moot Hall. Dr. Wellesley's house is on one side of the Moot Hall; ours is on the other."

"It would take you a very short time, then, to go home?"

"A minute or two."

"Very well! And you went to Dr. Wellesley's at seven thirty?"

"Just about that."

"Then you were with him most of the time you were there—in his drawing-room?"

"Certainly—all the time, except for the two or three minutes I spent in going to the mayor's parlor."

"Talking to Dr. Wellesley?"

"Of course! What do you suppose I went for?"

"That's just what I want to find out," retorted Meeking, with a glance that took in the audience, now all agog with excitement. "Will you tell us, Mrs. Mallett?"

Mrs. Mallett's handsome face became rigid, and her well cut lips fixed themselves in a straight line; but she relaxed them to rap out one word.

"No!"

"Come now, Mrs. Mallett—this is a serious, a very serious inquiry. It is becoming more serious as it becomes increasingly mysterious. You have already told us that you went, secretly, to Dr. Wellesley's house in order that you might see him and, afterward, the mayor, Mr. Wallingford. Now you must have had some very special reason, or cause, for these interviews. What was it, Mrs. Mallett?"

"No! That's my business—nobody else's. I shall not say."

"Does Dr. Wellesley know what it was?"

"Of course!"

"Would the mayor have known, if you had seen him?"

"Considering that that was the object I had in wanting to see him, of course he would," retorted Mrs. Mallett. "I should think that's obvious."

"But you didn't see him, eh?"

"You know very well I didn't."

"Pardon me, madam," said Meeking, with lightninglike promptitude, "but I don't know anything of the sort. However, does any one else know of this—business?"

"That, too, is my concern," declared Mrs. Mallett, who had bridled indignantly at the barrister's swift reply. "I shan't say."

"Does your husband know of it?"

"I'm not going to say that, either."

"Did your husband—who, I believe, is

one of the town trustees—did he know of your visit to Dr. Wellesley's house on this particular occasion?"

"I'll answer that. He did not."

"Where was he, while you were at Dr. Wellesley's? Had you left him at home?"

"No—he had gone out before I went out myself. As to where he was, I should say he was either at the Conservative Club or at Mr. Simon Crood's. Is it relevant?"

Amid a ripple of laughter, Meeking made a gesture which signified that he had done with Mrs. Mallett, and she presently stepped down from the witness box.

Meeking turned to the coroner.

"I want to have Dr. Wellesley in that box again, sir," he said.

"Let Dr. Wellesley be recalled," commanded the coroner.

Wellesley, once more in the full gaze of the court, looked vexed and impatient. Those who had occasionally glanced at him while Mrs. Mallett was giving her evidence had observed that he showed signs of being by no means pleased at the turn things had taken since her sudden intervention. Sometimes he had frowned; once or twice he had muttered to himself. He looked blackly at Meeking as the barrister once more confronted him.

"You have heard the evidence of the last witness?" Meeking asked abruptly.

"All of it," replied Wellesley.

"Is it correct as to details of time?"

"So far as I recollect, quite."

"When Mrs. Mallett went by the private door between your drawing-room and the Moot Hall, to see the mayor, what did you do?"

"Waited for her in my drawing-room."

"How long was she away?"

"Four or five minutes, perhaps."

"Had you made any appointment with the mayor on her behalf?"

"No, I had not."

"You sent her to see him on the chance of her finding him there—in the mayor's parlor?"

"There was no chance about it. I knew, as a good many other people did, that Wallingford spent almost every evening in the mayor's parlor."

"Had you ever visited him there during these evening attendances of his?"

"Oh, yes—several times."

"By this communicating door?"

"Certainly; and he had made use of it in coming to see me."

"Do you know what the mayor was doing on these occasions? I mean, do you know why he spent so much time at the mayor's parlor of an evening?"

"Yes—he was going into the financial affairs of the borough."

"Now I want to put a very particular question to you, with the object of getting at some solution of this mystery. What was Mrs. Mallett's business with you and the mayor?"

"I cannot reply to that."

"You won't give me an answer?"

"I won't."

"Do you base your refusal on professional privilege, doctor?"

"No, not at all. Mrs. Mallett's business was of an absolutely private nature. It had nothing whatever to do with the subject of this inquiry. I tell you that on my honor—on my oath—nothing whatever."

"You mean, not directly?"

Meeking threw a good deal of significance into this question, which he put slowly, and with a peculiarly meaning glance at his witness; but Wellesley either did not see, or affected not to see, any special significance, and his answer came promptly.

"I mean precisely what I say, as I always do."

Meeking leaned across the table, eyeing Wellesley still more closely.

"Do you think, knowing all that you do now, that it had anything to do with it indirectly—indirectly?"

Self-controlled though he was, Wellesley could not repress a start of surprise at this question. It was obviously unexpected. It seemed to those who, like Brent and Tansley, were watching him narrowly, that he was considerably taken aback by it. He hesitated.

"I want an answer to that," said Meeking, after a pause.

"Well," replied Wellesley at last, "I can't say. What I mean by that is that I am not in a position to say. I am not sufficiently acquainted with—let me call them facts—to be able to say. What I do say is that Mrs. Mallett's business with me and with Wallingford, that evening, was of an essentially private nature, and had nothing whatever to do with what happened in the mayor's parlor just about the time she was in my drawing-room."

"That is, as far as you are aware?"

"As far as I am aware—yes; but—I am quite sure it hadn't."

"You can't give the court any further information that would help to solve this problem?"

"I cannot."

"Well, a question or two more. When Mrs. Mallett left you at your door in Piper's Passage—I mean, when you let her out, just before a quarter to eight—what did you do next?"

"I went upstairs again to my drawing-room."

"May I ask why?"

"Yes. I thought of going to see Wallingford, in the mayor's parlor."

"Did you go?"

"No. I should have gone, but I suddenly remembered that I had an appointment with a patient in Meadow Gate at ten minutes to eight o'clock; so I went back to the surgery, exchanged my jacket for a coat, and went out."

"On your oath, have you the slightest idea who killed John Wallingford?"

"I have not the least idea. I never have had."

Meeking nodded, as much as to imply that he had no further questions to ask. When his witness had stepped down, he turned to the coroner.

"I should like to have Bunning, the caretaker, recalled, sir," he said. "I want to ask him certain questions which have just occurred to me. Bunning," he continued, when the ex-sergeant had been summoned to the witness box, "I want you to give me some information about the relation of your rooms to the upper portion of the Moot Hall. You live in rooms on the ground floor, don't you? Yes? Very well, now—is there any entrance to your rooms other than that at the front of the building—the entrance from the Market Place?"

"Yes, sir—there's an entrance from St. Laurence Lane, at the back."

"Is there any way from your rooms to the upper floors of the Moot Hall?"

"Yes, sir—there's a back stair, from our back door."

"Could anybody reach the mayor's parlor by that stair?"

"They could, sir, certainly; but either I or my wife would see them."

"Just so—if you were in your rooms; but you told us in your first evidence that from about seven twenty or so until eight o'clock you were smoking your pipe at the Market Place entrance to the Moot Hall, where, of course, you couldn't see your back

door. That correct? Very well! Now, while you were at the front, was your wife in your rooms at the back?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know what she was doing?"

"I do, sir. She was getting our supper ready."

"Are you sure she never left the house—your rooms, you know?"

Bunning started. Obviously, a new idea had occurred to him.

"Aye!" said Meeking, with a smile.

"Just so, Bunning. You're not sure?"

"Well, sir," replied Bunning slowly, "now that I come to think of it, I'm not. I never thought of it before, but during that time my missis may have been out of the place for a few minutes or so, to fetch the supper beer, sir."

"To be sure! Now where does Mrs. Bunning get your supper beer?"

"At the Chancellor Vaults, sir—around the corner."

Meeking turned quietly to the coroner.

"I think we ought to have Mrs. Bunning's evidence," he remarked.

It took ten minutes to fetch Mrs. Bunning from her rooms in the lower regions of the old Moot Hall. She came at last, breathless, and in her working attire, and turned a wondering, good-natured face on the barrister.

"Just a little question or two, Mrs. Bunning," he said, in a tone of indifference. "On the evening of the late mayor's death, did you go out to the Chancellor Vaults to fetch your supper beer?"

"I did, sir—just as usual."

"What time?"

"A bit earlier than usual, sir—half past seven."

"How long were you away?"

"Why, sir, to tell you the truth, nigh on to half an hour. I met a neighbor at the corner, and—"

"Exactly—and you stopped, chatting a bit. So you were out of your rooms in the Moot Hall that evening from seven thirty to nearly eight o'clock?"

"Yes, sir."

Meeking gave the coroner a glance, thrust his hands into his pockets, and dropped back into his seat, silent and apparently satisfied.

## XX

If the barrister was satisfied with the possibilities suggested by this new evidence,

the gist of which had apparently altered the whole aspect of the case, the coroner obviously was not.

Ever since Mrs. Mallett had interrupted his address to the jury, he had shown signs of fidgetiness. He had continually put on and taken off his spectacles. He had moved restlessly in his chair. Now and then he had seemed on the point of interrupting counsel or witnesses. It was evident that things were not at all to his liking. Now, as Meeking sat down, the coroner turned to Mrs. Bunning, who stood, looking wonderingly about her, and still fingering the apron in which she had been found at her work.

"Mrs. Bunning," he said, "I want to ask you some questions about this back entrance of yours. What is it—a door opening out of the rear of the Moot Hall?"

"Yes, sir—that's it, sir."

"Does it open on St. Laurence Lane?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does it open into—a hall, a lobby, a passage, or what?"

"A lobby, sir, next to our living room."

"Is there a staircase, then, in that lobby, by which you can get to the upper rooms in the Moot Hall?"

"Yes, sir—that's the staircase we use, me and my husband, when we go up for cleaning and dusting, sir."

"Then, if anybody went in by that door while you were out that evening, whoever it was could go up that staircase to the upper rooms?"

"Yes, sir, they could."

"And get to the mayor's parlor?"

"Yes, sir. The staircase leads to the big landing, sir, and the door of the mayor's parlor is at the far end of it."

"And you were out of your rooms for half an hour that evening?"

"Just about that, sir. It would be a bit after half past seven when I went out, and it was just before eight when I went in again."

"Did you notice anything that made you think somebody had been in?"

"No, sir—nothing."

"Had you left your door open—your outer door?"

"Yes, sir, a bit ajar. Of course, I never thought to be away from the house for many minutes, sir."

"Very good! That's all, thank you, Mrs. Bunning," said the coroner. He looked around the court. "Is the borough



surveyor still there?" he asked. "If so, let him come into the witness box again."

But Walkershaw had gone, nor was he to be found in his office in another part of the building. Once more the coroner looked around.

"I dare say we are all familiar with what I may call the geography of St. Laurence Lane," he remarked; "but I want some formal evidence about it that can be put on the record. I see Mr. Krevin Crood there. I believe Mr. Crood is as good an authority on Hathelsborough as anybody living. Perhaps he'll oblige me by coming forward."

Krevin Crood, sitting at the front of the densely packed mass of spectators, rose and walked into the witness box. The coroner leaned confidentially in his direction.

"Mr. Crood," he said, "I believe you are familiar with St. Laurence Lane, in its relation to the immediately surrounding property?"

"I am, sir," replied Krevin. "I am familiar with every inch of it."

"Just describe it to us, as if we knew nothing about it," continued the coroner. "You know what I mean."

"Certainly, sir," assented Krevin. "St. Laurence Lane is a narrow thoroughfare, about eighty to ninety yards in length, which lies at the back of Mr. Mallett's house—I mean the bank premises—the Moot Hall, and Dr. Wellesley's house. Its north entrance, at the corner of the bank, is in Woolmarket; its south in Strand Lane. On its west side there is a back door to the bank house; another into Bunning's rooms in the basement of the Moot Hall; a third into the police office, also in that basement; a fourth into the rear of Dr. Wellesley's house. On the opposite side of the lane—the east—there is nothing but St. Laurence's Church and churchyard. St. Laurence's church tower and west end face the back of the Moot Hall. There is a part of the churchyard opposite the bank premises—the rear premises. The rest of the churchyard faces Dr. Wellesley's house—the back of it, of course."

"Is the lane much frequented?"

"No, sir—it is very little used. Except by tradesmen going to Mr. Mallett's and Dr. Wellesley's back doors, and by people going to the police office, it is scarcely used at all. There is no traffic along it. On Sundays, of course, it is used by people going to the services at St. Laurence's."

"Would it be likely to be quiet—unfrequented—of an evening?"

"Emphatically yes."

"Do you think it likely that any person wishing to enter the Moot Hall unobserved, and seeing Mrs. Bunning go away from her rooms and around the corner to the Chancellor Vaults—as we've just heard she did—could slip in unseen?"

"Oh, to be sure!" affirmed Krevin. "The easiest thing in the world! If I may suggest something—"

"Go on! Go on!" said the coroner, waving his spectacles. "Anything that helps—suggest whatever you like."

"Well," said Krevin slowly and thoughtfully, "if I may put it in my own way, suppose that there is somebody in the town who is desirous of finding the late mayor alone in the mayor's parlor, being cognizant of the fact, well known to many people, that the late Mr. Wallingford was to be found there every evening. Suppose, too, that that person was well acquainted with the geography of St. Laurence Lane and the Moot Hall. Suppose, further, that he or she was also familiar with the fact that Mrs. Bunning invariably went out every evening to fetch the supper beer from the Chancellor Vaults. Such a person could easily enter the Bunnings' back door with an absolutely minimum risk of detection. The churchyard of St. Laurence is edged with thick shrubs and trees. Anybody could easily hide among the shrubs—laurel, myrtle, ivy—watch for Mrs. Bunning's going out, and, when she had gone, slip across the narrow lane and enter the door which, as she says, she left open. It would not take two minutes for any person who knew the place to pass from the churchyard to the mayor's parlor, or from the mayor's parlor to the churchyard."

A murmur of comprehension and understanding ran around the court. Most of the people present knew St. Laurence Lane and the Moot Hall as well as Krevin Crood knew them, and his suggestion appealed to their common sense.

Tansley, with a sudden start, turned to Brent.

"That's done it!" he whispered. "Everybody tumbles to that! We've been going off on all sorts of side tracks all the morning—now Wellesley, now Mrs. Mallett, and now here's another! Access to the mayor's parlor—there you are! Easy as winking, on Krevin Crood's theory."

Lay you a fiver to a shilling old Seagrave won't go any further!"

Herein Tansley was quickly proved to be right. The coroner was showing unmistakable symptoms of his satiety for the time being. He thanked Krevin Crood punctiliously for his assistance, and, once again toying restlessly with his spectacles, turned to the jury, who, on their part, looked blank and doubtful.

"Well, gentlemen!" he said. "It seems to me that the entire complexion of this matter is changed by the evidence we have heard since Mrs. Mallett broke in so unexpectedly upon what I was saying to you. I don't propose now to say any more as regards the evidence of either Dr. Wellesley or Mrs. Mallett. Since we heard what they had to say we have learned a good deal, which I think will be found to have more importance than we attach to it at present. As matters stand, the evidence of Mrs. Bunning is of supreme importance. There is no doubt whatever that there was easy means of access to the mayor's parlor during that half hour wherein the mayor met his death. The mystery of the whole affair has deepened considerably during today's proceedings. Instead of attempting to bring this inquiry to a definite conclusion, I feel that I must wait for more evidence. I adjourn this inquest for a month from to-day."

The court cleared. The spectators filtered out into the Market Place in various moods, and under different degrees of excitement. Some were openly disappointed that the jury had not been allowed to return a verdict. Some were vehement in declaring that the jury never would return a verdict. Here and there were men who wagged their heads sagely, and remarked with sinister smiles that they knew what they thought about it.

Within the rapidly emptying court, Brent, Tansley, and Hawthwaite were grouped around Meeking. The barrister was indulging in some private remarks upon the morning's proceedings, chiefly addressed to the police superintendent.

"There's no doubt about it, you know," he was saying. "The evidence of the Bunning woman, supplemented by what Krevin Crood said—which was merely a formal crystallizing of common knowledge—has altered the whole thing. Here's the back entrance to the Moot Hall left absolutely unprotected, unguarded, unwatched, or

whatever you like to call it, for half an hour—the critical half hour. Of course, the murderer got up to the mayor's parlor that way, and got away by the same means. You're as far off as ever, Hawthwaite! It's a pity you wasted time on that jealousy business. I watched Wellesley closely, and I believe he spoke the truth when he said that whatever there might have been, there was no jealousy about Mrs. Saumarez between him and Wallingford at the end. My own impression is that Wellesley was clear off with the lady."

Hawthwaite, essentially a man of fixed ideas, looked sullen.

"Well, it isn't mine, then," he growled. "From all I've learned—and I've chances and opportunities that most folks haven't—my impression is that both men were after her, right up to the time Wallingford was murdered. I can tell you this, and I could have put it in evidence if I'd thought it worth while—Wellesley used to go and see her of an evening, constantly, up to a very recent date, though she was supposed to have broken off with him and to be on with the mayor. Now then!"

"Do you know that for a fact, Hawthwaite?" asked Tansley.

"I know it for a fact. He used to go there at night, and stop late. If you want to know where I got it from, it was from a young woman that used to be housemaid at the Abbey House, Mrs. Saumarez's place. She's told me a lot. Both Wallingford and Wellesley used to visit there a good deal, but, as I say, Wellesley used to be there very late of an evening. This young woman says she knows for a fact that he was often with her mistress till close on midnight. I don't care twopence what Wellesley said—I believe he was, and is, after her, and of course he'd be jealous enough about her being so friendly with Wallingford. There's a deal more in all this than's come out yet—let me tell you that!"

"I don't think anybody will contradict you, Hawthwaite," observed the barrister dryly; "but the pertinent fact is what I tell you—the fact of access. Somebody got to the mayor's parlor by way of the back stair, through Bunning's rooms, that evening. Who was it? That's what you've got to find out. If only you had found out, before now, that Mrs. Bunning took half an hour to fetch the supper beer that night, we should have been spared a lot of

talk this morning. As things are, we're as wise as ever."

Then Meeking, with a cynical laugh, picked up his papers and went off. Brent, leaving Tansley talking to the superintendent, who was inclined to be huffy, strolled out of the Moot Hall and went around to the back, with the idea of seeing for himself the narrow street which Krevin Crood had formally described.

He saw at once that Krevin was an admirable exponent of the art of description. Everything in St. Laurence Lane was precisely as the former town clerk had said. There was the door into the Bunnings' rooms, and there, facing it, the ancient church and its equally ancient churchyard.

It was to the churchyard that Brent gave most attention. He immediately realized that Krevin Crood was quite right in speaking of it as a place wherein anybody could conveniently hide—a dark, gloomy, sheltered, high-walled place, filled with thick shrubbery, out of which, here and there, grew somber yew trees, some of them of an antiquity as venerable as that of the church itself. It would be a very easy thing indeed, Brent decided, for any designing person to hide among these trees and shrubs, to watch the Bunnings' door until Mrs. Bunning left it, jug in hand, and then to slip across the grass-grown, cobble-paved lane, silent and lonely enough, and up to the mayor's parlor. But—all that presupposed knowledge of the place, and of its people and their movements.

Brent went back to the Market Place and toward the Chancellor. As he turned into the hotel, Peppermore came hurrying out of it. He carried a folded paper in his hand, and he waved it at Brent, who, at sight of the newspaper man, came to a sudden halt.

"Just been looking for you, Mr. Brent!" Peppermore said mysteriously. "Come into some quiet spot, sir, and glance at this. Here we are, sir—corner of the hall."

He drew Brent into an alcove that opened close by them, and, affecting a mysterious air, began to unfold his paper—a sheet of news print which, as Brent's professional eye was quick to see, had just been pulled as a proof.

"All that affair to-day, Mr. Brent," he whispered, "was most unsatisfactory, sir, most unsatisfactory—unconvincing, inconclusive, Mr. Brent. The thing's getting no further, sir, no further—except, of course,

for the very pertinent fact about Mrs. Bunning's absence from her quarters that fateful evening. My own impression, sir, is that Hawthwaite and all the rest of 'em don't know the right way of going about this business. The *Monitor* is going to wade in, sir! The *Monitor* is coming to the rescue! Look here, sir—we're going to publish a special edition to-night, with a full account of to-day's proceedings at the inquest, and with it we're going to give away, as a free, gratis supplement—what do you think, sir? This—produced at great cost, sir, in the interest of justice! Look at it!"

Therewith Peppermore, first convincing himself that he and his companion were secure from observation, spread out before Brent a square sheet of very damp paper, strongly redolent of printers' ink, at the head of which appeared, in big, bold, black characters, the question:

#### WHO TYPED THIS LETTER?

Beneath it, excellently reproduced, was a facsimile of the typewritten letter which Wallingford had shown to Epplewhite and afterward left in his keeping; and beneath that was a note in large italics inviting any one who could give any information as to the origin of the document to communicate at once with the editor of the *Monitor*.

"What d'ye think of that for a *coup*, Mr. Brent?" proudly demanded Peppermore. "Up to Fleet Street form, that, sir, ain't it? I borrowed the original, sir, had it carefully reproduced in facsimile, and persuaded my proprietor to go to the expense of having sufficient copies struck off on this specially prepared paper, to give one away with every copy of the *Monitor* that we shall print to-night. Five thousand copies, Mr. Brent! That facsimile, sir, will be all over Hathelsborough by supper time!"

"Smart!" observed Brent. "Top-hole idea, Peppermore! And you hope—"

"There aren't so many typewriters in Hathelsborough as all that," replied Peppermore. "I hope that somebody 'll come forward who can tell us something. Do you notice, sir, that this has been done—the original, I mean—on an old-fashioned machine, and that the lettering is considerably worn. Sir? I hope the *Monitor's* efforts will solve the mystery!"

"Much obliged to you," said Brent. "There's a lot of spade work to do—yet."



He was thinking over the best methods of accomplishing that spade work, when, late that evening, he received a note from Queenie Crood. It was confined to one line:

To-morrow—usual place—three—urgent.—Q.

## XXI

BRENT went to bed that night wondering what it was that Queenie Crood wanted. Since their first meeting in the castle grounds, they had met frequently. He was getting interested in Queenie, who developed on acquaintance. Instead of being the meek and mild mouse of Simon Crood's domestic hearth, as Brent had fancied her to be on his visit to her uncle's house, he was discovering possibilities in her that he had not suspected. She had spirit, and imagination, and a continually rebellious desire to get out of Simon Crood's cage and spread her wings in flight—anywhere, so long as Hathelsborough was left behind.

She had told Brent plainly that she thought him foolish to buy property in the town. What was there in that rotten old borough, said Queenie, to keep any man of spirit and enterprise there?

Brent argued the point in his downright way. It was his job, he conceived, to take up his cousin's work where it had been laid down. He was going to regenerate the old town of Hathelsborough.

"And that you'll never do!" affirmed Queenie. "You might as well try to blow up the castle keep with a halfpenny cracker. Hathelsborough people are like the man in the Bible—they're joined to their idols. You can try and try, and you'll only break your heart, or your back, in the effort, just as Wallingford would have done. If Wallingford had been a wise man, he'd have let Hathelsborough go to the devil in its own way. Then he'd have been alive now!"

"Well, I'm going to try," declared Brent. "I said I would, and I will. You wait till I'm elected to that town council—then we'll see!"

"It's like fighting a den of wild beasts," said Queenie. "You won't have a rag left on you when they're through with you."

She used to tell him, at these meetings, of the machinations of Simon Crood and Coppinger and Mallett against his chances of success in the Castle Ward election. According to her, they were moving heaven and earth to prevent him from succeeding

Wallingford. Evidently believing Queenie to be a tame bird who would carry no tales, they were given to talking freely before her during their nightly conclaves.

Brent heard a good deal about the underhand methods in which municipal elections are carried on in small country towns. He was almost as much amused as amazed at the unblushing corruption and chicanery of which Queenie told him; and now he fancied that she had some special news of a similar sort to give him.

The election was close at hand, and he knew that Simon and his gang were desperately anxious to defeat him. Although Simon had been elected to the mayoralty, his party in the town council was in a parlous position. At present it had a majority of one. If Brent were elected, that majority would disappear, and there were signs that at the annual elections in the coming November it would be transformed into a minority.

The opponent whom Brent had to face in this by-election was a strong man, a well known, highly respected ratepayer, who, though an adherent of the old party, was a fair-minded and moderate politician, likely to secure the votes of many independent electors. It was going to be a stiff fight, and Brent was thankful for the occasional insights into the opposition's plans of campaign which Queenie was able to give him.

But there were other things than this to think about, and he thought much as he lay wakeful in bed that night, and as he dressed next morning. The proceedings at the adjourned inquest had puzzled him—had left him doubtful and uncertain.

He was not sure about the jealousy theory. He was not sure about Mrs. Saumarez, from what he had seen of her personally, and from what he had heard of her. He was inclined to believe that she was not only a dabbler in politics, with a liking to influence men who were concerned in them, but that she was also the sort of woman who likes to have more than one man in leash. He was now disposed to think that there had been love passages between her and Wallingford—and not only between her and Wallingford, but also between her and Wellesley. There might, after all, be something in the jealousy idea.

But then came in the curious episode of Mrs. Mallett, and the mystery attaching to it. As things presented themselves at present, there seemed to be no chance what-



ever that either Mrs. Mallett or Wellesley would lift the veil on what was evidently a secret between them.

The only satisfactory and straightforward feature about yesterday's proceedings, Brent thought, was the testimony of Mrs. Bunning as to her unguarded door. Now, at any rate, it was a sure thing that there had been easy means of access to the mayor's parlor that evening. What was necessary was to discover who it was that had taken advantage of the opportunity.

After breakfast, Brent went round to see Hawthwaite. The superintendent gave him a chair and eyed him expectantly.

"We don't seem to be going ahead very fast," remarked Brent.

"Mr. Brent!" exclaimed Hawthwaite. "I assure you we're doing all we can; but did you ever know a more puzzling case? Between you and me, I'm not at all convinced about either Dr. Wellesley or Mrs. Mallett. There's a mystery there which I can't make out. They may have said truth, and they mayn't, and—"

"Cut them out—for the time being, anyway," interrupted Brent. "We got some direct evidence yesterday, for the first time."

"What?" questioned Hawthwaite.

"That door into Bunning's room," replied Brent. "That's where the murderer slipped in."

"Aye—but did he?" said Hawthwaite. "If one could be certain—"

"Look here!" asserted Brent. "There is one thing that is certain—dead certain—that handkerchief."

"Well?" asked Hawthwaite.

"That should be followed up," continued Brent. "There's no doubt whatever that that handkerchief, which Wellesley admits is his, got sent by mistake to one or other of Mrs. Marriner's other customers. That's flat! Now, you can trace it."

"How?" exclaimed Hawthwaite. "A small article like that!"

"It can be done, with patience," said Brent. "It's got to be done. That handkerchief got into somebody's hands, and that somebody is probably the murderer. As to how it can be traced—well, I suggest this. As far as I'm conversant with laundry matters, families, such as Mrs. Marriner says she works for, have laundry books. These books are checked, I believe, when the washing is sent home. If there's an article missing, the person who does the

checking notes it. If a wrong article's inclosed, that, too, is noted, and returned to the laundry."

"If Wellesley's handkerchief got to the wrong place, why wasn't it returned?" demanded Hawthwaite.

"To be sure—that's just what you've got to find out," retorted Brent. "You ought to go to Mrs. Marriner's laundry and make an exhaustive search of her books, lists, and so on, till you get some light—see?"

"Mrs. Marriner has, I should say, a hundred customers," remarked Hawthwaite.

"Don't matter if Mrs. Marriner has five hundred customers," said Brent. "That's got to be seen into. If you aren't going to do it, I will. Whoever it was that was in the mayor's parlor tried to burn a blood-stained handkerchief there. That handkerchief was Dr. Wellesley's. Wellesley swears he was never near the mayor's parlor, and I believe him. That handkerchief must have got by error into the box or basket of some other customer of Mrs. Marriner. Trace it!"

He rose and moved toward the door. Hawthwaite nodded.

"We'll make a try at it, Mr. Brent," he said; "but, as I say, to work on a slight clew like that—"

"I've known of far slighter clews," replied Brent.

Yet, as he went away, he reflected on the extreme thinness of this clew. It was possible that the handkerchief had passed through more hands than one before settling in those of the person who had thrown it on the hearth, stained with Wallingford's blood, in the mayor's parlor; but it was a clew, and, in Brent's opinion, *the* clew.

One fact in relation to it had always struck him forcibly—the murderer of his cousin either was a very careless and thoughtless person, or had been obliged to quit the mayor's parlor very hurriedly. Any one meticulously particular about destroying clews or covering up traces would have seen to it that the handkerchief was completely burned before leaving the room. As it was, it seemed to Brent that the murderer had either thrown the handkerchief on the hearth, seen it catch fire, and paid no more attention to it—which would denote carelessness—or had quitted the place immediately after flinging it aside—which would imply that some sound from without had startled him—or her.

Him—or her! Which was it? There

were certain features of the case which had inclined Brent, of late, to speculating on the possibility that his cousin had been murdered by a woman. And, to be sure, a woman was now in the case—Mrs. Mallett. If only he knew why Mrs. Mallett went to see the doctor and the mayor!

But this, after all, was mere speculation, and he had a busy morning before him, in relation to his election business. He had been continuously engaged all the time when at three o'clock he hurried to the castle grounds to meet Queenie. He found her in her usual haunt—a quiet spot in the angle of a wall, where she was accustomed to sit and read.

"Well! Why 'urgent'?" asked Brent, as he dropped into the seat at her side.

"To make sure that you would come," retorted Queenie. "Didn't want to leave it to chance."

"I'm here," said Brent. "Go ahead with the business!"

"Did you see the *Monitor* last night, and that facsimile they gave away with it?" inquired Queenie.

"Yes, I did. I saw the facsimile before it was published. Peppermore showed it to me."

"Very well! That's the urgent business. I know on whose machine that letter—the original, I mean—was typed."

"You do?" cried Brent. "Greet Scott! Whose, then?"

"Uncle Simon Crood's. Fact!"

"Whew! So the old fossil's got such a modern invention as a typewriter, has he? And you think—"

"Don't think—I know! He's had a typewriter for years. It's an old-fashioned thing, a good deal worn out. He rarely uses it, but now and then he operates, with one finger, slowly. That letter originated from him—from his machine."

"Proof!" said Brent.

Queenie took up a book that lay on the seat between them, and from it extracted a folded copy of the *Monitor's* facsimile. She leaned nearer to Brent.

"Now look," she said. "Do you notice that two or three of the letters are broken? That M—part of it's gone. That O—half made. The top of that A is missing. More noticeable still—do you see that the small t there is slanting the wrong way? Well, all that's on Uncle Simon's machine. I knew where that letter originated as soon as ever I saw this facsimile last night!"

She laid aside the supplement, and, once more opening her book, produced a sheet of paper.

"Look at this," she continued. "When Uncle Simon went out to the tannery this morning, I just took advantage of his absence to type out the alphabet on his machine. Now, then, you glance over that and compare the faulty letters with those in the facsimile. What do you say now?"

"You're a smart girl, Queenie!" said Brent. "You're just the sort of girl I've been wanting to meet—a girl who can see things when they're right in front of her eyes. That's sure, positive proof that old Simon—"

"Oh!" broke in Queenie sharply. "Oh! I say!"

Before Brent could look up, he was conscious that a big and bulky shadow had fallen across the graveled path at their feet. He lifted his eyes: There, in his usual raiment of funereal black, his top hat at the back of his head, his hands behind him under the ample skirts of his frock coat, his broad, fat face heavy with righteous and affectedly sorrowful indignation, stood Simon Crood. His small, piglike eyes were fixed on the papers which the two young people were comparing.

"Hello!" exclaimed Brent. He was quick to see that he and Queenie were in for a row—probably for a row of a decisive sort which would affect both their lives. He purposely threw as much hearty insolence into his tone as he could summon. "Eavesdropping, eh, Mr. Crood?"

Simon withdrew a hand from the sable folds behind him, and waved it in lordly fashion.

"I've no words to waste on impudent young fellers as comes from nobody knows where," he said loftily. "My words is addressed to my niece, as I see sitting there, deceiving of her lawful relative and guardian. Go you home at once, miss!"

"Rot!" exclaimed Brent. "She'll go home when she likes—and not at all, if she doesn't like. You stick where you are, Queenie. I'm here!"

As if to prove the truth of his words, he slipped his right arm around Queenie's waist, clasped it tightly, and turned a defiant eye on Simon.

"See that?" he said. "Well, that's just where Queenie stops, as long as ever Queenie likes! Eh, Queenie?"

The girl, reddening as Brent's arm

slipped around her, instinctively laid her free hand on his wrist. As he appealed to her, he felt her fingers tighten there with a firm, understanding pressure.

"That's all right!" he whispered to her. "We've done it, girly—it's for good!" He looked up at Simon, whose mouth was opening with astonishment. "Queenie's my girl, old bird!" he went on. "She isn't going anywhere—not anywhere at all—at anybody's bidding, unless she likes. And why shouldn't she be here?"

It seemed, from the pause that followed, as if Simon would never find his tongue again; but at last he spoke.

"So this here is what's been going on behind my back, is it, miss?" he demanded, pointedly ignoring Brent and fixing his gaze on Queenie. "Carrying on with strangers at my very gates, as you might say, and in public places in a town of which I'm chief magistrate! What sort of return do you call this, miss, I should like to know, for all that I've done for you? Me that's lodged and boarded and clothed you, ever since—"

"What have I done for you in return?" demanded Queenie, with a flash of spirit. "I've saved you the wages of a couple of servants for all these years; but this is the end. If you're going to throw that in my teeth—"

Brent drew Queenie to her feet and turned her away from Simon. He gave the big man a look over his shoulder.

"That's it, my friend!" he said. "That's the right term—the end! Find somebody else to do your household drudgery. This young lady has done her last stroke for you. Now don't begin to blus-

ter," he added, as Simon, purpling with wrath, shook his fist. "We'll just leave you to yourself!"

He led Queenie away down a quiet walk. Behind the shelter of some trees, he put a finger under her chin, and, lifting her face, looked steadily at her.

"Look here, girly," he said. "You heard what I whispered to you just now—'It's for good'? Didn't I say that? Well, is it?"

Queenie managed to get her eyes to answer him at last.

"Do you mean it?" she murmured.

"I just do!" answered Brent fervently. "Say the word!"

"Yes, then!" whispered Queenie.

She looked at him wonderingly when he had bent and kissed her.

"You're an extraordinary man!" she said. "What am I going to do now? Homeless!"

"Not much!" exclaimed Brent. "You come along with me, Queenie. I'm a good hand at thinking fast. I'll put you up, warm and comfortable, at Mother Appleyard's, and as quick as the thing can be done we'll be married. Got that into your little head? Come on, then!"

That night Brent told Tansley of what had happened, and of what he was going to do. Tansley listened, laughed, and shook his head.

"All right, my lad!" he said. "I've no doubt you and Queenie will suit each other excellently; but you've settled your chances of winning that election, Brent! Simon Crood will bring up every bit of his heavy artillery against you now—and he'll smash you!"

*(To be continued in the November number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)*

#### ALPHA AND OMEGA

How many years have slipped away  
Since this old planet, seamed and gray,  
Was but an atom none could trace  
Nursed on the boundless lap of Space,  
No man can say.

How many years of joy and woe—  
Life's flood tide and its undertow—  
Shall slip away o'er land and sea  
Until our world shall cease to be,  
No man can know.

*William Hamilton Hayne*

# The Present Hour

A MEMORY OF YOUNG LOVE AND RUSTIC SIMPLICITY CONTRASTS WITH THE GLARE AND GLITTER OF A BROADWAY ROOF GARDEN

By Reita Lambert

NICKY STEARN'S famous jazz orchestra was dallying waggishly with the incipient chords of a favorite fox trot, as the gilt-embellished elevator released a group of after-theater arrivals. High up above Broadway, above the glare of animated electric signs, with a pallid moon riding close in futile competition, and the street noises mounting in adulterated whiffs, the dancers moved silently over the hard cork floor of the roof garden.

Opalescent lights from a myriad swaying lanterns touched the steady pink and white of artificial complexions with a youthful glow, and lent lackluster eyes a meretricious sparkle. The luminous sheen of soft silks and snowy shoulders blended with the crisp black and white of masculine evening dress. The unity of motion on the dance floor was like some grotesque processional executed to the exotic rhythm in which Chopin and MacDowell alike were cunningly incorporated. The voice of the pretty cigarette girl intoned its ingratiating chant, and waiters padded softly about with officious servility.

Kenneth Sherril held a small silver flask above his wife's ginger ale glass, his brows lifted questioningly. She nodded languidly.

"Not too much!" she warned.

"Just enough to wake you up a bit, Bernie," he said, and poured with the severe concentration of an epicure.

His wife's listless gaze was upon the dancers. Her pale, pink-tipped hands were folded idly in her lap. The gleaming buckle on a snug satin slipper vibrated to the involuntary tapping of her foot.

"Shall we dance?" asked Sherril.

They swung off sedately, with the unconscious ennui of satiety. As they danced,

the pervasive bouquet of a dozen rare sachets met and mingled with the fumes from as many brands of cigarettes. Dark shoulders made an effective background for slender, bejeweled hands. Embryonic amours were coaxed into voluptuous fruition by the hedonic lure of lights and music.

"It's really too crowded for comfort tonight," Bernice complained, as a lugubrious note from the saxophone announced the end of the final encore.

Her husband agreed petulantly. The dancers drifted back to their tables, and the chatter recommenced. Bernice patted the regular waves of her marcel and touched a long jade earring with investigating fingers. She lifted her glass, and over its brim lazily appraised her neighbors.

Halfway down the roof, at a small table hugging the ornate paling, her widening gaze lingered, held by what seemed to be a startled incredulity.

"What is it? See some one you know?"

Sherril turned laboriously in his chair to follow his wife's glance. She set down the glass with a hand whose palm was slightly moist.

"Some one I used to know—back home when I was a youngster. Quite startled me, seeing him here, and with all these lanterns, too—"

Her voice had trailed off to a bemused murmur.

"Yes?" Sherril essayed a polite and sympathetic interest. "Who is he? What's his name?"

For a moment her thoughts probed among the debris of many dusty memories, but when her answer came it was in the past tense.



"His name was Victor," she said softly  
—"Victor Shaw."

## II

PLEASANT GLEN basked in the fragrant, enervating heat of a warm July afternoon. As far as Victor could see from the vantage point of his father's drug store window, Main Street was virtually deserted. The maples flanking the wide thoroughfare drooped dustily above the yellow roadbed. Brilliantly colored dragonflies tacked pointlessly back and forth, like gayly caparisoned craft in search of some vanished port.

The drone of women's voices from Mrs. Cunley's porch, a few doors distant, reached him faintly. An occasional battered buggy or farm wagon lumbered past in the direction of the country, with food supplies and burlap bags of grain bulging from beneath the seats.

So profitless was the prospect that Victor wandered moodily back to the marble fountain and to the further cultivation of his grievance. No fun, this darned soda clerking stunt every darned summer! As if college wasn't bad enough, without having to face this every vacation! It was mean, that's what it was—darned mean.

He polished a tall glass belligerently. A queer sort of father for a fellow to have, turning his only son into a darned soda slinger every summer, just as if he couldn't hold down a regular job as well as any man!

It was at this point of his morose reflections that Victor caught the glint of sunshine on a curly head on the other side of the screen door, and his heart collided violently with his Adam's apple. He turned his back to the counter and began to whistle lustily. Sudden activity supplanted his sullen somnolence. His was the preoccupation of a very busy man.

A prim little voice brought him right-about-face with an air of industry reluctantly and temporarily suspended.

"Why, h'lo, Bernie!" he replied, with a great show of surprise.

"Good afternoon, Victor. It's pretty hot, isn't it?"

"It certainly is a hot day," agreed Victor earnestly.

"I'll have a chocolate soda, please, with vanilla cream in it."

She seated herself on the high stool before the counter, and curled her trim

ankles about the rungs. The sun had touched her hair with a dozen tints, ranging from buttercup yellow to rich bronze, and her skin was overlaid with a coating of warm tan, through which the flush of her cheeks glowed like late August peaches. Her short nose and firm forearms were sprinkled with golden freckles. The neck and sleeves of her stiffly starched white frock were edged with billowing ruffles.

She watched gravely while Victor became engrossed in the creation of a draft fit to tempt a sated Epicurus. He set it before her with a portentous flourish, a work of art combining beauty and sustenance. Bernice shook a dime out of her handkerchief and slid it toward him, but the boy brushed it back magnificently.

"Permit *me!*" he said, and dived into his own pocket.

From a handful of small change he selected the required ten cents, and rang up the sale in the cash register. This high-handed chivalry was all over before Bernice could find words to protest.

"Oh, Victor, you *mustn't!*" she chided primly. "I just *can't* come in here for sodas if you *will* do those things!"

"Shucks!" Victor shrugged largely. "Pleased to do it, I'm sure. It—it's a pleasure!"

"Well, thank you—ever so much!"

Disapproval overcast her gratitude, but she sipped daintily, and with relish.

"Is it all right? Sweet enough?" asked Victor critically.

"Oh, yes, thanks—it's just fine. It was so hot in the sun!"

"Certainly *is* pretty hot," Victor agreed, and busied himself with sundry faucets and bottles.

Now that the required formalities had been observed, he was like a forlorn lost chicken at roosting time walking disconsolately around its barricaded coop, in search of some niche through which it might crawl to the coveted shelter within.

This haughty composure of Bernice's was trying—and inevitable. Victor always started out to meet her on her own coolly impersonal ground, but her sustained frigidity had a way of stripping him of his own carefully studied nonchalance, of reducing him to cloutish awkwardness. He was slipping now, impelled by a warm ardor for the captivating little figure.

He bent over the counter and spoke eagerly.

"Oh, Bernie, did your father say you could go?"

"Go! Where?"

The guileless question reduced him to wretched incredulity.

"You know—to the dance at Ellsmere, Saturday night."

"Oh, that!" It needed more than Victor's perspicacity to discover beneath her words any hint of the dramatic scene in Bernie's household that morning. "Why, yes, of course I can go—if I want to."

"Oh, bully!" breathed the boy—who would, of course, never guess that the fresh white frock and the casual visit to the drug store had been planned for the sole reason of imparting this bit of information. "But you *do* want to go, don't you, Bernie?"

"Oh, I don't mind. I s'pose I might as well."

"What do you think?" His voice was vibrant with glad anticipation. "Dad says I can take Emma and the new buggy. It's going to be great. There'll be a moon—a full moon. I looked it up in the almanac."

"Is that so? That 'll be nice!"

Her cool little voice carried a maternal tolerance for his enthusiasm. It urged him on to greater descriptive heights.

Everybody was going. An orchestra from Poughkeepsie had been engaged, and was bringing all the newest dance tunes from the New York productions.

But Bernice might have been a weary post-débutante with a string of titled scalps to her credit. She stepped down from the high stool at last, dabbing at her moist lips with an inadequate handkerchief.

"We'll have to start pretty early," Victor was saying desperately. "I'll come for you by seven, or a little after."

"All right, Victor—I'll try to be ready by then," she told him sweetly. "And thanks ever so much for the nice soda!"

The boy watched her retreating figure with baffled frustration in his eyes. And only last night, in her hammock, he had held her hand and talked largely of his college exploits, a young male dominant over her shrinking timidity! Well, girls were certainly funny—darned funny!

### III

THE moon had yet to climb into the ken of Pleasant Glen, when, on Saturday night, Victor pulled old Emma to a standstill between the thills of the new buggy and hopped blithely out. He opened the sag-

ging gate before a vine-ridden cottage, and strode up the path.

From between the closed shutters of the parlor blind a girl's eager eyes watched his approach, noting his dark coat and carefully creased white flannel trousers, his sleeked-back hair and the tasty nonchalance of his soft collar. He rang twice before the voice of the watcher's mother summoned her with a note of impatience.

"That must be Victor for you, dear! Didn't you hear the bell?"

And only then did she saunter to the door with the manner of one disturbed at important tasks.

"Oh, it's you, Victor! Is it seven o'clock already?"

"After!" said Victor, taking in her flowered organdie and flaring rose sash with approval. "You'd better bring a wrap—it 'll be cold coming home."

When she came out, with a scarlet cape flung over her arm, he was holding Emma's head, with a belligerent eye on the affectionate old mare that implied dire possibilities were he to relax his vigilance. He helped her gallantly to the seat and took his place at her side. Over her shoulder, Emma inspected them gravely before starting off down the turnpike road toward Ellsmere.

The village streets were engulfed in smoky twilight. The rattle of a lawn mower, interwoven with children's laughter, followed them on a breeze laden with the pungent odor of newly cut grass and late lilac.

Clear of the village, the road narrowed to a cañon flanked by trees and bushes, vocal with bird and insect chatter. Beyond the covered bridge lay a marshy field with a slender white birch standing sentinel over an army of swaying cattails. Scenting an indefinite journey, old Emma settled into a placid jog trot.

"Isn't it a great night for the dance, though?" remarked Victor, breaking a long silence.

"It certainly is," agreed Bernie warmly; "so cool and lovely, too!"

"Be pitch dark before we get there," he predicted.

"Goodness! I hope you can see to drive all right!"

"Don't you worry about that," he told her easily. "The moon 'll be out later, and anyway, I've got the lantern with me."

At seventeen, it was Bernie's first out-of-town dance, and her pulses were quick

with the thrill of it. The novelty of the adventure, the mystery of the gently descending night, the proximity of the boy beside her, all titillated her senses pleasantly, and lent the event an aura of romance.

They chatted happily of dancing, of the night, of the burnt-leather table cover Bernie was doing for Victor's room at college. And the moon rode punctually out over a low hillock, bland and yellow and watchful, touching the vague trees and fields with an iridescent glow.

As Victor had so sagely prophesied, when they reached Ellsmere, night had fallen like a black velvet back drop for the gayly lighted town hall. Along the four roads leading into the town vehicles of every description lumbered in, bearing their blithesome cargo to the epochal event. Victor drove his horse into a long, low shed, loosened her bridle, and proudly led Bernie up the festooned path to the rambling wooden building, which served for various public functions, from stray theatrical performances to revival meetings.

Already the place was a scene of lively activity. On a raised platform at one end of the main hall the musicians were "tuning up" with discordant ostentation.

According to custom, Bernie left her escort at the door and went upstairs to a small room curtained off for feminine primping. Here, before a cracked mirror, clustered a bevy of rural belles in correct gala grandeur, amid a veritable orgy of hair patting and sash straightening. A wash basin and pitcher, some decrepit chairs, and a rack laden with cloaks and spangled veils converted the niche into a practical "ladies' room."

Bernie snatched a coveted moment at the glass, ran a side comb through her hair, touched her nose daringly with some rice powder tied up in her handkerchief, and started gayly downstairs.

Victor was waiting for her. Over the balustrade she could see his dark head, freshly sleeked. Her descent suddenly began to seem a spectacular performance, and she was smitten with a self-consciousness that had in it an element of theatricalism. The unexpected blare of music for the first two-step enhanced this sensation, and it was with a wistfully regal air that she gave Victor her hand and stepped off on the waxed floor for the first dance.

It was fortunate that the hall was a large one, for half a dozen neighboring towns

had contributed to the assembly. In rows of chairs that discreetly hugged the walls, prideful parents smilingly regarded their offspring. Occasionally even these ancients essayed a round or two of the room; but it was the young people's night. Flaming cheeks and sparkling eyes were lifted to their partners; sashes twirled and pumps sloughed off their new sheen. A few despised youngsters joined their elder sisters and brothers on the floor—scorned prodigies in long white stockings and corkscrew curls.

After the first dance, Bernie found herself besieged by a small army of white flannels and bombarded with requests for dances. A dramatic glow colored this procedure as she dealt out favors to the young gallants. Victor's eyes reproached her over the heads of her attentive circle, and she sparkled back impudently at him.

The music blared forth. The white placard on the piano spelled "waltz." "Come along!" some one shouted. "It's 'Yip I Addy'!"; and she was being whirled about to the jolly waltz tune. "Rings On My Fingers" followed—an irresistible two-step. True to their promise, the Poughkeepsie musicians had brought with them all the new song hits of 1909.

Bernie was in the thrill of a heady exhilaration. She was dancing with a demure lad whose eyes were frankly ardent, when she caught Victor's jealous gaze upon her. For some unaccountable reason the encounter heightened her buoyancy. She dazzled the demure boy guiding her through the intricacies of the barn dance.

"One, two, three—kick!" she sang gayly.

She noted that the girl with whom Victor was dancing was stolid and frowzy—a veritable country bumpkin. Joyous discovery!

But at the first bars of the waltz from "The Merry Widow," Victor pushed his way through Bernie's little court, a determined light in his dark eyes.

"This is mine!" he announced, and grasped her firmly about the waist with the air of a man who has stood enough nonsense.

The strains of that familiar air wove its spell over the dancers. Even the collected Bernie was not impervious to its appeal. She could feel Victor's arms tighten about her, and a wistful apathy succeeded her careless gayety. Life became at once hopelessly sad, insufferably sweet; a thing of

profound reflections and haunting memories, of infinite melancholy, unrequited love, pining Isabellas, and dank, myrtle-grown graves.

The warm breeze bore the odor of honey-suckle and wild roses through the open windows. Victor's wan gaze was upon her face, his breath stirred her hair at the temples. He, too, was sad—every one was sad! Well, life was like that—sad, like the poem that goes—"I never loved a fond gazelle." Rough little marbles seemed to fill Bernie's throat. She was excruciatingly miserable.

A storm of applause broke through the portals of her spirit's pensive retreat. She staggered a little as Victor's arms fell from her waist. The musicians were leaving—coldly, heartlessly leaving! She sent an alarmed glance at Victor.

"Intermission," he explained, and added eagerly: "Supper—downstairs—let's hurry and get ahead of the bunch!"

They flew down the stairs with the impetus of a newly discovered hunger. Long tables laden with sandwiches, pickles, and cake were spread in the basement. Exuberant voices acclaimed the collation, and there ensued a good-natured battle for places on the long benches. Victor achieved seats for Bernie and himself, and piled their plates with delicacies. Puns were perpetrated, jokes were retold, girls giggled behind their paper napkins and dipped mischievously into their escorts' ice cream.

"It's always more fun after intermission," Victor told Bernie over his third sandwich; and if noise was any criterion, he was right.

With their waning vitality restored by numberless sandwiches and cups of coffee, the musicians strolled back to their instruments. The dancers swarmed joyously up the stairs—youth, drunk on the potent liquor of its own distilling.

#### IV

BERNIE's heady exuberance returned. She was borrowing Circe's own immortal weapons now, with an observant eye to Victor's flattering disapproval.

The demure lad with the ardent eyes paid devoted court, and she accorded him dance after dance—not because she specially favored him. On the contrary, she was beginning to find his ardor trying. There was a curious glaze filming his eyes, and his breath had a strangely offensive odor,

acquired, somehow, since intermission. In dancing, he held Bernie closer than her fastidious taste approved; but the chance to arouse Victor's patent jealousy was not to be resisted.

They had come triumphantly through an exacting Boston when the demure lad suggested a stroll on the porch, and Bernie shyly acquiesced. The two wandered outside to the low veranda encircling the building, and explored its dim lengths. The candles in many of the paper lanterns had flickered out, leaving the night in unopposed possession. From the shed where the horses were tied, a pensive whinny followed them.

The demure lad's arm still clutched Bernie's. He was frankly making love to her now, and she exchanged coquettish repartee with him bravely, but with an ear cocked for the opening chords of the next dance. When they came, her spirits lifted with instant relief, and she turned coyly to her companion.

"I guess we'd better go back now, hadn't we?"

"Go back to that stuffy hall, when it's so nice and cool out here?"

His voice fell ingratiatingly close to her ear. Other strollers were deserting the porch for the hall. Bernie watched them trooping through the door with rising fear.

"Oh, I've got to go in!" she said, and took a determined step away from him.

His hand clutched her arm and drew her back. She could see his face, a pallid oval in the darkness, very close to her own, and she knew that he was going to kiss her.

"You haven't got to do anything but die and pay taxes!" he told her facetiously, and bent his head lower.

Wild panic seized her. His nearness was horrid.

"Please let me go!" she cried.

She struggled fiercely to avoid his lips.

"Didn't you hear the young lady ask you to let go?"

A tall figure stepped resolutely out of the shadows. The demure lad relaxed his grip on Bernie, and turned to face her champion.

"What business is it of yours?" he demanded hotly.

Victor was upon him. The two figures grappled silently, and went over the edge of the low porch. Locked together on the dark lawn, they assumed the proportions of a grotesque double-headed monster.



Saved from the ignominy of that hateful kiss, Bernie watched the battle, her hands at her throat, her eyes wide with fear. The dance music continued in callous oblivion, unconsciously lending an effective off-stage accompaniment to the little drama.

Bernie's threatened danger loomed larger in her imagination; Victor's championship took on the color of medieval heroism. The shadowy lawn became a bloody Acel-dama echoing with the ring of metal, and the two boys intrepid knights fighting for their lady's favor. A slender Chloe, in beruffled organdie, she stood in an ague of fear for her knight—but not for long.

A figure emerged from the *mêlée*—the taller figure of the two—and came toward Bernie, brushing his hands together lightly, like the magician when he has produced a rabbit from the gentleman's hat. The demure lad was staggering away in the direction of the village.

"Oh, Victor!" cried Bernie. "You're not hurt?"

"Shucks, no! I had to teach him a little lesson. He had been drinking."

He sleeked back his hair casually, although his breast still heaved, and Bernie saw that he was, miraculously, unhurt. Her reaction was an impulse to cry, and she swallowed hard. Victor patted her shoulder gently.

"There, there! It's all right—no need to be frightened, Bernie!"

If the admonition was a bit tardy, its effect upon the girl was none the less reassuring. It was a generous annulment of her odious behavior toward him during the evening; but the incident had cost her the scepter she had wielded so cruelly. It was Victor who held it now with quiet mastery.

"I—I think we'd better go home," suggested Bernie meekly.

"Not a bad idea," agreed Victor. "Run along and get your coat."

When she reappeared, Emma and the new buggy, with the lantern swinging from the axle, were before the porch. In portentous silence Victor helped her in, followed, and picked up the reins.

## V

THE moon had deserted them, and the stars were already paling, as if in sympathy. Fields and shrubs were overlaid with a heavy coating of satiny dew, through which the narrow road ambled, a dark, ragged ribbon. A chorus of the tiny frogs

known to country people as "peepers," filled the night with a mournful ululation.

Miserably penitent, Bernie huddled against the seat. Victor loomed beside her, his splendid heroism draping him in unapproachable majesty. Bernie searched desperately for words that would dissipate the wretched silence—something airy and nonchalant; but it was her contrite little heart that spoke:

"I'm awfully sorry, Victor, about—everything—that dreadful boy, and all!"

"Oh, shucks!" said Victor prosaically, rising to unexpected heights of bliss on his own magnanimity.

Silence fell again, but shot through, now, with tender vibrations.

"Cold, little girl?"

If she had been cold, his sweet solicitude would have dispelled the chill. She shook her head shyly, gratefully, but he was unconvinced. She felt his arm encircle her shoulder, while he made a pretense of drawing her cape more snugly about her throat. Involuntarily she relaxed against his arm, and he drew her head down until it found the hollow of his shoulder.

The lantern beneath the buggy sent out hopeful little rays into the tangled undergrowth beside the road, and old Emma's hoofs clumped a patient tattoo on the dry earth. Victor's arm engirdled Bernie—a protective bulwark against the thickening mysteries of the night.

Presently his cheek found hers, and for the second time that evening Bernie knew that she was going to be kissed. An exquisite tremor assailed her while his head sank lower and his lips sought her own. It was a gentle, reverent kiss, and there was magic in it—tears and exaltation and sweet oblivion.

"Dear, dear little girl!" His voice was husky with passionate awe. "You *do* love me a little?"

She buried her face in his coat, and he patted her hair gently. She felt suddenly timid and fragile and clinging. She wished to feel so—with Victor. By some strange atavistic instinct she knew that her helplessness was at once her power and her appeal.

"You *do* love me, Bernie?"

She found it possible to nod shyly against his coat.

"You'll wait for me until I'm through college?"

She nodded again, and snuggled closer.

"You'll never love any one else?"

A challenge to her fidelity! She drew away, hurt beyond belief.

"Oh, Victor!" she cried reproachfully.

He was adamant, being wise with the wisdom born of that eventful evening.

"You'll never let any other fellows kiss you?" he insisted.

"Victor! How can you?"

Ah, indeed, how could he? In an agony of remorse he kissed the hurt from her eyes.

"It 'll only be two more years, sweetheart!" he said cheerily.

But they both recognized it for the desolate æon it was, despite his light tone.

"And you'll have to go away from me!" she said sadly.

For a moment the dismal prospect of enforced separation quite extinguished the flame of their ecstasy.

"Are you sure, Victor," pressed Bernie, when that anticipatory shroud had lifted, "that he didn't hurt you—that awful boy?"

"Him? Hurt *me*? Ba-ah!" said Victor with cryptic awfulness.

"Oh, Victor!"

The armor of his impressive insouciance was not proof against that flattering anxiety.

"Lucky for him I didn't kill him!" he added darkly.

Awed silence followed, broken by the call of a persevering whippoorwill. Feeble points of light ahead whisked their Arcadia to the prosaic purlieus of Pleasant Glen, breaking through the night like the emissaries of some relentless adversary. Old Emma bore them, in mute dejection, through the sleeping village to Bernie's gate. The anguish of parting rendered them inarticulate for a moment. Victor was first to speak.

"Say you love me before you go, Bernie! Say it!"

"You *know*, Victor!" she temporized shyly.

"Say it!" he demanded.

His fingers closed firmly, compellingly, over hers. The proprietary pressure of that strong, warm hand served to imbue her with something of his own high valor—to lend her heart the courage of its tender passion. She found the words, small as they were, and almost unintelligible against his coat.

"I—I do I-love you, Victor!"

"And you'll wait for me—always?"

Ah, the impassioned ardor of that young voice as she promised, with her wet eyes yearning up to his, and her scarlet cape falling away from her little immature white throat!

"Forever and ever, Victor!" she breathed.

## VI

THE strains of a seductive fox trot quickened the sluggish pulses of the dancers on the ornate roof garden beetling over Times Square. Bernice Sherril sipped her drink mechanically. Her nostalgic gaze was on the man whose presence there had connoted that long dead episode, transformed the colored electric lights into the gaudy paper lanterns that had once festooned the town hall at Ellsmere, and invested the strained and blasé faces about her with the blithe placidity of those rural revelers.

She noted, with a grim little droop of the lips, that his dark hair was sleeked shinily back, as of old, but that time had splashed his temples with silver—a benevolent act that lent him added distinction. His clothes showed a meticulous attention to detail significant of the thorough cosmopolite, but the old, irresistible charm was in the smile he flashed upon his companion, the old allure in the deferential incline of his head.

The woman, Bernie noticed, was a stunning creature in a décolleté gown of shimmering black. Marooned in the little oasis of their own preoccupation, they were flirting across the narrow table—experts at a game whose secret processes they had long since fathomed.

Watching them from beneath her lowered lids, Bernice saw the man cover his companion's hand with his own—an impulsive gesture, at once proprietary and tender. Of a sudden her nostrils were assailed by the agglomerate odors of a summer night, her ears by the faint, persistent complaint of a distant whippoorwill and by the throbbing tones of a young voice, eagerly demanding:

"Say it! Say it!"

She tore her eyes away from that narrow table, her hands at her throat pulsating with an uprush of emotion that threatened to suffocate her, and anchored her distraught gaze to the florid familiarities of her husband's face. He was patting back a yawn with a nicely manicured hand, and

his querulous words sifted through his languid fingers:

"How about it? Shall we trot along? It's so darned crowded to-night!"

Mechanically she slipped her arms into her wrap, rose, and made her way toward the elevator.

"Always the case!" her husband was grumbling. "Saturday night—crowded, stuffy—"

His voice trailed off petulantly.

Crowded! Stuffy! Saturday night!

The words broke through the protective

barricade of her supine inertia, and stirred the quiescent ghosts within the sepulcher of her memory. For a moment she gazed back into that dank cavern, and contemplated the ruins left by the inexorable march of time. In an agony of frustration she recognized clearly, and for the first time, her impotence to halt the marching army of years, or to reconstruct the devastation left in their wake.

And then Nirvana, in the guise of the gilt embellished elevator, received her, and she was catapulted down to the street below.

# Jonathan Steck, Supersleuth

## THE STORY OF THE MYSTERIOUS SERIES OF ROBBERIES AT THE MAISON ELISÉE

By Cynthia Vaughn Kirkman

THE house detective tripped timidly into the luxurious office of Mme. Elisée, owner and manager of the exclusive and heretofore well ordered Maison Elisée.

Madame tapped a silver pencil angrily on her tapestried desk.

"Seet yourself down, Steck, an' tell to me ze meaning of all zis," she said.

Every one at the Maison Elisée knew perfectly well to what "all zis" referred. It had all begun about six weeks before, when the Stylish Stout had missed a five-dollar bill from her purse, which she had fastened securely in her locker. General opinion around the place held that she must have lost the money before entering the building, until, the following day, she discovered the five-dollar bill in her make-up box, pinned to her powder puff.

The make-up box, at the time, was in the models' room, where she usually kept it. Mystery—how did the five dollars get out of the locker, and how did it get into the make-up box?

There followed a series of miraculous disappearances and reappearances of articles of trifling value, and small sums of money. While all this was quite annoying,

it was held to be the work of some practical joker with a perverted sense of humor, and was not taken seriously until articles of greater value began to disappear, without reappearing at all. To-day the climax had come, as madame proceeded to explain to Steck.

"Some weeks ago I talk wiz you about ze zings zat been missing; but when zey all come back again, I say I zink he is all a joke, an' tell you not to give plaisir to ze jokiaire by paying ze attention. Now he is not a joke, and zis is ze last limit. My patience she is on end. Zis morning Mme. René she come to me an' say, 'One of my kid gloves she is gone. Yesterday eet is feevty cents from my coat pocket. I look everywhere, eet is not zere. Puff! She is gone like zat!' I laugh at Mme. René. 'Puff!' I say to her. 'You are gone in ze head—like zat!' Zen I meet Mme. Dubois in ze hall. 'Nom de Dieu!' she say to me. 'My cus-to-mer, her card case, she is gone from ze fitting room!' We look in ze room, an' ze card case is not zere. Zen I phone you."

Steck leaned forward almost joyfully.

"Robbery!" he murmured, dwelling soulfully on each syllable of the word.

A real, honest-to-goodness robbery for the first time in ten years! Mystery and new importance for Steck—Steck, who for twenty drab years had faithfully served *Elisée* as errand boy, as delivery man, and finally as house detective.

Upon Steck had been bestowed the title of house detective by the kind-hearted *Elisée* more as a reward for his long years of service than for any faith she had in him as a sleuth. *Madame* was old-fashioned in the matter of house detectives, and had no real use for them. She had managed her business for a generation with little loss from thievery. On the rare occasions when she had suffered robbery, an outside detective, hired to ferret out the criminal, had usually proved quite satisfactory.

The bestowing of his title on Steck had satisfied both her sense of humor and the new detective's vanity. It served in lieu of a pension, for the last thing in the world Steck desired was to leave *Elisée's*, even on a pension.

The little man had taken his new honor quite seriously. He was a simple-minded fellow, the son of an up-State farmer. From the time when he first arrived in New York, some twenty years before, he had devoted himself entirely to his humble duties at *Elisée's*.

He was intensely loyal to the place. On assuming his new duties, he had been greatly concerned about the carelessness with which things were left about, fairly tempting people to make away with them; but his remonstrances had never stirred *madame* to any action in the matter.

As time went on, and none of his predictions as to petty or grand larceny came true, he became vastly discontented. To what end had he read all the literature bearing on detective work, and even gone to the length of taking a correspondence course in the art? He was thoroughly trained to face the most mysterious crime and solve its secret—and there was no crime to solve!

In short, Steck was beginning to feel that with all his new honor he was merely a supernumerary, while he longed to be a supersleuth.

Imagine, then, the delight with which the little man hailed this opportunity to vindicate himself!

"Robbery!" he repeated, his whole soul in the thrilling syllables.

"Of course eet eez rob-bery," *madame* answered impatiently; "but who eez ze zief? Somebody in zis vairy building—an' who eet eez you mus' discover for me."

Steck plucked an imaginary thread from the lapel of his gray alpaca coat, and squared his shoulders importantly.

"I'll report to you to-morrow morning," he promised *madame*. "I got my suspicions already."

He rose with dignity, marched downstairs to the employees' entrance, paused beside the time clock, and removed the time cards from the file. These he carried back into the deserted lunch room, pulled a three-legged stool up to one of the tables, and spread the cards out before him.

## II

Up in the third-floor front room, rough and unshapely hands were transforming cobweb laces and gauzy silks into clinging copies of exclusive models. The workwomen, lifting tired eyes from monotonous basting and fittings, stole swift, envious glances through the windows at the throngs strolling along Fifth Avenue.

On the floor below, in the models' room, soft and slender fingers were busy rouging cheeks and lips that were already pink, and repowdering snowy arms and shoulders. Saleswomen wandered in every now and then, to straighten hair nets and powder noses before the early afternoon customers began to drift in.

Seated in the corner, the Perfect Thirty-Six gazed complacently at her reflection in the mirror, patted her near-auburn side-puffs into shape, yawned, and kicked her show slippers from under the bench.

"Went to see a swell show last night," she volunteered.

Six pairs of model eyes regarded her with interest.

"'Deburau,' it was called. French, you know. Fellah spends his life gettin' stung, till he gets wise that life ain't all jazz—yes, he does! But he meets a swell chicken and tumbles again. Then what happens but along comes another guy with a lot more dough, an' what does she do but up an' give the poor boob the air? Hey, who's got my stockin's?"

"Ain't seen 'em," offered the girl from the wholesale dress house.

"Yeh—you wouldn't!" sniffed the Perfect Thirty-Six. Stockings or no stockings, these wholesale people should be kept in



place. "Stuffed 'em in my slippers this noon, an' they're gone. Second pair an' a half that's been swiped on me this season, too!"

The Stylish Stout, seated across the room, glared.

"Say, where d'ye get that rough stuff, Hortense? Swiped 'em! Huh, mebbe Ambrose used 'em to mop up with this noon. Better look in the wastebasket. Swiped 'em! My Gawd! Lock the door an' hide the key!"

"What d'ye mean, look in the wastebasket? Four ninety-eight I had to pay for those babies, an' I guess this ain't the first funny thing that's been pulled around here, anyway!"

Hortense Bergold slipped her black stockings and oxfords back on again with disgust.

"Well, guess I'll go down to my locker and see if my old pinkies are still living," she said, as she tossed her slippers angrily under the seat and started on the search for her last season's stockings.

Outside, in the passageway, a group of excited saleswomen were clustered around the door of the stock room. Mme. Elisée had just arrived upon the scene, and was sharply questioning Mahoney, head stock clerk.

"Ze blue fox zat I bring from Paris wiz me—*sacré mille de cochons!*" she gasped. "Mahoney, you say you put eet away yourself last night? Vairy well! Zere are three keys to ze room. You have one, Steck has one, and mine she does not count. She ees in my desk. Where ees eet zat you keep ze key?"

Mahoney indignantly exhibited her key, hanging majestically from a rusty safety pin fastened to the belt of her apron.

Madame spotted Hortense.

"Go downstairs and find for me Steck," she directed sharply.

Hortense sped down the front stairs to the doorman.

"Seen Steck?" she asked.

Von Bülow jerked a white-gloved thumb over his left shoulder.

"Back in the lunch room, lookin' over the time cards. What's up?"

"Ask Elisée," Hortense advised him, as she darted off in pursuit of Steck. "How am I to know?"

Through the back hall came the odor of coffee. Ambrose, *chef* by courtesy of the lunch room at Elisée's, and odd-job man

in chief, had evidently arrived. As Hortense started to enter the room, she found him leaning over Steck's shoulder with interest. The two were conversing earnestly, and Hortense paused before entering.

"Wall!" Steck was saying, as he gently rubbed the pale red stubble which decorated his chin. "I dunno! 'Pears to me that 'most anybody might be guilty, barrin' Elisée herself."

Here Steck recalled directions given in a battered copy of "Sleuthfoot," which he had in his pocket.

"The common proceedin's is to have a suspect an' then establish a motive," he continued. "Now any one here but Elisée might have a motive, mightn't they? So 'most anybody in the buildin' might be suspected; but you got to narrey it down to a few. There's only one A, an' that's Andrews, that drives the wagon. He ain't never here, so he's out. Then comes that Bergold girl. I'm goin' to keep my eye on her, all right! Gettin' here half an hour late every mornin', an' then chuckin' me under the chin an' thinkin' I ain't goin' to have her docked for comin' in late!"

Hortense slipped back behind the door, stifling her first impulse to protest forcibly. Why not stay and find out where things stood?

Ambrose pushed back his white starched cap and scratched his forehead.

"Well, now, I don't know about that, Steck. She ain't half so bad as the next one. Margie Connelly's the Stylish Stout, y' know. I'd believe anything of a girl what cleans my place out the way she does every noon. Eight sandwiches, two cups o' coffee, an' sometimes three hunks o' mince pie! Then she's always tryin' to charge it, an' fergittin' to pay. A regular criminal, if ever there was one, Steck—them's my sentiments!"

So down went the Stylish Stout on the criminal list.

"Well, there ain't no D's nor E's nor F's," observed Steck. "The G's and H's an' I's I don't know nuthin' about, so that lets them out. Mary Kearney comes next, and I like her, so she don't count. Hey, what about Mahoney? Oh, yeh—bein' stock clerk, she's got keys to everything, same as me. Down she goes!"

"You bet, an' better put all the salesladies down, too. I don't trust that bunch o' swells that go gallivantin' around to swell restaurants, an' never patronizin'

Ambrose, that always gives everybody a square deal. They get so used to puttin' things over on the customers, too. Down-right demoralizin', that's what!"

And thus it was that the list of suspects was compiled by the science of elimination, Steck, the eminent criminologist, being aided and checked by Ambrose.

Hortense entered the lunch room noisily.

"Hey, Steck! Elisée wants you upstairs," she announced affably. "A blue fox has gone from the stock room; an' I guess y' might as well look up one of my silk stockings that's gone too, while you're at it."

Steck and Ambrose exchanged glances. Had the head model made away with something of her own, to avert suspicion?

Steck mysteriously scribbled a few lines in his yellow notebook, snapped it shut, and stored it away in his vest pocket. Then he glanced coldly at Hortense.

"You ain't tellin' me nothin' that I didn't know already," he observed with crushing dignity. "I had my presentiments some time ago."

Presentiments, Steck understood, are the things that make detectives what they are. He believed there was no better set of presentiments in town than those stored away in his own fuzzy head.

Ambrose listened to him with undisguised admiration.

"Some presentiments, I'll say," sniffed Hortense, "from all the work you've had presentin' yerself around here detectin'! Must have had lots of time to polish 'em up while you was watchin' the time clock an' emptyin' wastebaskets around the place—eh, what?"

Steck clenched his hands together grimly as he stalked out of the room.

"Mebbe so — mebbe so," he muttered. "Wait an' see—just wait an' see!"

### III

UPSTAIRS, the commotion had nearly subsided. Mahoney had stationed herself in front of the closed stock room door, defying further invasion. The saleswomen were busy with their customers, and the models were displaying the new imports in the showroom.

Mahoney gave Steck Mme. Elisée's orders—that he was to meet her upstairs in the office, immediately.

Steck resented taking even Elisée's orders from Mahoney, and listened to the

stock clerk disdainfully. As he walked away, he turned to shoot a baleful glance back over his shoulder at her.

"Take it from me, some o' these people who do so much talkin' around here ain't goin' to have so much to say pretty quick. You mark my words!"

He shook his stubby finger at her warningly. Mahoney received the warning with a broad grin and a chuckle.

"Just tickle old Steck to pieces to have Elisée think I'd been fiddling with things around the place," she told herself; "just because I'm the only one what's been here longer than he has!"

But Mahoney's broad grin soon faded from her large face, and an anxious pucker wrinkled her forehead into worried little lines.

Quickly forgetting the indignities he had suffered at the hands of Hortense Bergold and Mahoney, Steck trudged happily up to the office. He found Elisée pacing up and down her room excitedly.

"Ze blue fox—you hear about zat, Steck?"

Steck nodded his head gravely, with the profound assurance of the all-hearing.

"Steck, you tell me already you suspect somebodies. Who eez eet?"

Steck closed the door cautiously, and settled himself comfortably in a big chair by the window.

"Madame, you must be prepared for anything," he warned her darkly. "This is a woman's job, if ever I saw one."

Mme. Elisée shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Well, what of eet? How do you know he is a woman, and who eez eet?"

"Patience, *madame*—patience," said Steck soothingly. "It is a woman, and a poor woman—that much is certain. A man would have taken something more valuable, an' something he could have got rid of quick. Also he wouldn't have got skeered off so easy at first, an' put back the money an' things as soon as they was missed, without even tryin' to make a get-away. It was a poor woman, because the card case an' the fifty cents an' the fur would 'a' meant something to her. She didn't want to sell the card case an' the fur, or she'd 'a' taken something more valuable, wouldn't she? No, siree! She wanted them two things to doll up herself for a beau on Sunday. An' furthermore"—triumphantly—"I got the names of the

three women that's most likely to be guilty right here!"

"Who are zey?" demanded Elisée.

Steck consulted his yellow notebook impressively.

"Hortense Bergold, Mahoney, an' the Stylish Stout," he read.

Elisée pulled her lips together tightly, just in time to hide the first smile she had indulged in for some time.

"Ah, Steck!" she murmured. "Eet ees true zat you do not like zees people whose names you read to me, eez eet not?"

Steck shook his head violently.

"I should say not!" he agreed hotly.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if every one of 'em was guilty!"

Elisée laughed softly.

"Ah, I see!" said she. "Zee feevty cents for Mees Ber-gold, zee card case for Mahoney, and zee blue fox for Miss Connolly—or would you razer have ze blue fox for Mahoney, whom you like bes' of all, I zink?" Then *madame* grew serious.

"Ah, no, Steck, eet eez all wrong—I see zat now. You are—what you say? Ah, yes—prejudiced. Zat will nevaire do. I mus' get some one else to find zee zief for me—a man from outside. Zat ees all, Steck. You may go, an' zank you vairy much."

The little detective clutched the arms of his chair tightly, his lips trembled, and a half sob escaped as he closed them feebly. His first holiday in years—not from work, but to work as a glorified sleuth—gone! The zest of life and happiness gone, perhaps forever!

Elisée watched him with sympathy. Her anxiety, for the moment, had left her. She was realizing for the first time how devoted this funny little man had been to the Maison Elisée for the last twenty years, and how heartless it was of her to make fun of him.

"But, Steck, you must help zis new man. You see, it really all depends on you; for what will he know of ze house or ze employees if you, Steck, ze house detective, are not constantly wiz him?"

At this appeal to his loyalty, Steck rose miserably to his feet.

"Sure! I'll help him," he assured *madame*; "but he'll never take the same personal interest in the case that I have."

Elisée watched the little man ramble slowly down the hallway. His shoulders drooped disconsolately, as if they bore the

crushing weight of all the combined miseries of the world.

She pitied him tremendously, but the safety and the reputation of her business were at stake. A competent detective must be put on the job at once, before any further mischief was done.

Elisée snapped the telephone receiver off the hook, and got into communication with one of the leading detective agencies.

#### IV

THE next morning, Steck, as usual, was busy watching the employees punch their time cards. As the last stock girl hurried in, stamped her card, and rushed upstairs, an inconspicuous and nondescript man hesitated a moment before the employees' entrance, and then entered the hall. Steck glanced up, pushed his spectacles farther down upon his nose, and carelessly looked him over.

Satisfied that he had placed the stranger, he looked at him severely.

"Hey, you hemstitchers and knife pleaters make me tired!" Steck remarked. "The back door for yours! Ain't y' ever goin' to learn nothin'?"

Thomas Nevins, of the Burns Agency, smiled quietly at the amateur sleuth as he exhibited his credentials.

Steck readjusted his spectacles and looked over the newcomer with renewed interest.

"Wall, wall!" he ejaculated. "Who'd think you was a regular detective from a big place like that?"

Then swiftly came the thought that his greeting had lacked diplomacy, to say the least.

"Well, y' can't have everything, can ye?" he added comfortingly. "I guess ye got to have something more than looks to get goin' good, anyway."

Nevins smiled again.

"You must be Mr. Steck," he observed.

"As you have probably noticed, my name is Nevins. Now, if you don't mind, will you show me around the building a bit?"

After exploring the lunch and locker rooms and the delivery department in the basement, they went upstairs. Having shown Nevins around the fitting rooms and the big showroom, Steck took him to the stock room, and to the vault in which the furs were stored.

They met Mahoney in the hallway between the two rooms. She had just come

down from the workroom upstairs, to get some gowns and furs for the display windows. Steck mumbled a grudging "good morning" to her, and Mahoney regarded the stranger with curiosity.

"Who's your new friend?" she asked, as she unlocked the door to the vault.

"Nevins," answered Steck, as he stepped inside. "Well, I'll be gol-darned!" he gasped.

Mahoney peered over his shoulder, and tottered back against the door, to which she clung for support. Before them, on the floor, in tumbled disorder, lay the choicest of *madame's* valuable fur wraps and scarfs. The hangers on which they had been neatly hung were scattered about the room. The boxes in which the smaller skins were packed had been torn open and thrown into a disorderly mess in one corner of the room.

Nevins took in the whole situation in one swift glance.

"I suggest that we go over the rest of the building at once, see if anything else has been disturbed or removed, and then report to *madame*," he said to Steck. Then he turned to Mahoney. "Will you kindly see that nothing is disturbed here until I return?"

Across the hall, the stock room was in the same topsy-turvy state. A visit to the millinery department, and an interview with the excited Mme. René revealed the fact that three lace boudoir caps were missing, and that all the models' kid gloves had been removed from their lockers—which indicated that the thief had been in the building that very morning.

The tour completed, Nevins went directly to Mme. Elisée's office. There he remained for nearly an hour, conferring with *madame*.

Mahoney, in the meanwhile, checked up the missing stock from her inventory. The list included six small scarfs from the storeroom, and, from the stock department, a lace nightgown, a silk sweater, a purple umbrella, and one pink ballet slipper.

## V

MME. ELISÉE'S whole establishment, from the basement to the storerooms on the top floor, had been thrown into a state of complete confusion and uproar by this culminating episode.

One by one the employees were called into her office, for a complete account of

their movements in the building since the previous morning. Every one had her own favorite suspect, and little groups of saleswomen, stock girls, and models huddled together in empty fitting rooms and in the back hallway, to discuss their various theories regarding the robberies.

Elisée herself was desperate. In the whole house Nevins alone appeared to be perfectly well balanced and at ease. Steck watched his investigations with poorly concealed scorn.

"Half asleep—that's what he is, pussy-footin' aroun' like a bloomin' sleepwalker," he told Ambrose, who listened with sympathy to his friend between the cooking of pancakes for the workwomen's lunch.

"Now, if I was doin' it," continued Steck, "first thing I'd do would be to go to the suspects' homes. Mos' as likely as not, the thief's got an accomplice that's sneaked the things out for her. He makes me sick, I tell you, slidin' aroun' the carpets like a trained alligator, an' pretendin' he's a detective!"

In the afternoon the Maison Elisée quieted down, and the shop was closed after the usual routine of putting things in order and locking them up for the night.

About an hour before closing time Nevins disappeared from the premises, disregarding *madame's* plan that a night watchman from the agency should be left to guard the place. He sauntered out carelessly by the tradesmen's door in the rear of the basement, and passed down the alleyway leading to Sixth Avenue. Here he boarded a down town trolley car, from which he dismounted at Fifteenth Street. Turning to the left, he quietly opened the door of one of the shabby lodging houses, softly climbed the stairs, and moved down a dark, narrow passageway to the door at the end of the hall.

He paused to look over the long, narrow keys attached to his slender metal key ring. After selecting the one he desired, he placed it carefully in the keyhole, gently turned the greasy, finger-stained knob, and entered the modest dwelling of Jonathan Steck.

Half an hour later the door opened again. The owner of the apartment had arrived. Fumbling in his pocket, he finally discovered a match, struck a light, and turned on the gas.

Steck looked around the room, and



chuckled with glee as he rubbed his knotted old hands together with enthusiasm. Edging over to a cracked bit of mirror that hung over the tin wash basin in the corner, he shook his stubby finger playfully at his reflection, wagging his head approvingly.

Steck chuckled again as his eyes dwelled first on Mme. René's three lace boudoir caps decorating the three surviving posts of the decrepit bedstead in the opposite corner. The purple umbrella swung jauntily from its corded handle, which was twisted around the gas jet. From one of its enameled ribs dangled a tinselled ballet slipper, and on a broken old horsehair couch reposed the pink lace nightgown that had been the pride of Mahoney's life.

Steck affectionately eyed the little fur scarfs spread out on the faded red quilt which covered his bed.

"Nice kitties! Papa's goin' to take ye all home again," he promised them.

A few minutes later Steck staggered out under the weight of an awkward bundle. The expression on his face was far from that of a guilty man.

Then Nevins swiftly opened the closet door and followed, somewhat puzzled and decidedly cynical as to the purity of Steck's purpose. His impulse had been to arrest the little man before he could leave the house, but he decided to let him hang himself completely; for the Burns man was convinced that in some way his quarry had suspected he was being watched, and on the spur of the moment had sprung his soliloquy as a blind.

Steck trotted out of the tenement house and into a waiting taxi. At that instant the proprietor of a shop across the street came out, locked his door for the night, and started to crank up his flivver. Nevins dashed over, flashed his badge before the awed tradesman's eyes, and impressed him into service. Before Steck's chariot had rounded the first corner, the flivver was in pursuit.

## VI

MUCH to the pursuer's surprise, the fugitive pointed back to the Maison Elisée, as true to the course of a homing pigeon as traffic laws and rectangular blocks would allow.

From across the way, Nevins, keeping his involuntary driver waiting, watched Steck turn into the alley beside Elisée's. The house detective dismissed his taxi

promptly, and entered the building through the tradesmen's door, in the rear, with his bundle.

Before Nevins could call a policeman to watch the front entrance of the Maison Elisée, Steck reappeared, empty-handed. Again the professional detective restrained his impulse to arrest Steck on the spot, still curious as to what the little man would do next.

Shadowing Steck down the street, he paused long enough to warn the officer on the beat to keep an eye on Elisée's. Then he followed the house detective back to his home. He telephoned his office to have an assistant assigned to stand guard during the night, and to see that Steck did not escape.

The next morning the Burns detective gave a complete report to the astonished and indignant Mme. Elisée.

"But why eez eet zat you did not arrest heem?" *madame* demanded angrily.

"Because there's something queer about this game," Nevins explained. "The old boy may have a pal working with him, and if there's a gang on the job, and we give him rope, it may lead us to them. Maybe he got scared and returned the stuff as a blind, and they may try again."

"But why are you so sure zat he brought back ze zings, since you did not follow him into ze building?" asked *madame*, as she rang for Mahoney.

A second later the stock clerk burst into the room, her large arms overflowing with Steck's restored plunder.

"Found 'em in a bundle in the stock room!" puffed Mahoney. "Everything is here what was stolen!"

"You are sure zat everyzing eez zere?" Elisée demanded, fumbling excitedly with the goods, which Mahoney had spread out on a chair.

A brief inventory satisfied *madame*.

"Have you seen Steck zis morning, Mahoney?" was her next question.

But before Mahoney could answer, Steck appeared in the doorway, an expression of triumph on his withered old face.

"Yeh found 'em just where I left 'em, didn't yeh?" he exclaimed. "Thought ole Steck was slow, didn't yeh? Had to get an outside man on the job, an' me with my suspicions workin' right along! I just waited for a chance all these years to prove I wasn't just an ornymment around here. While this here gentleman was standin'

around an' lookin' wise, ole Steck hops right along, an' not only runs down the thief, but captures every last rag he stole! What's more, I reckon yeh been taught a pretty good lesson about takin' keer o' things around here, too!"

*Madame* dismissed Mahoney, and turned to Steck.

"But who was ze zief?"

"Can't tell yeh that, *madame*. Thief broke down under my rapid fire detection, an' agreed to bring everything back if I promised not to give him away."

"How dare you do zat, Steck? Ees eet for you or ees eet for me, Elisée, ze owner of ze place, to forgive ze scoundrel?"

Steck's complaisance faded. He nervously twisted a loose button on his shabby coat. *Madame* pressed her advantage.

"But what of ze suspects you tell me of? What of zem—Mahoney, Margie Connelly, and Mees Ber-gold?"

Steck shifted about uneasily. Then, lowering his voice, he confided in *madame*.

"To tell the truth, it was an' outside job, *madame*, an' my present'ments were wrong fer once."

*Madame* was somewhat mollified by his readiness to clear his ancient enemies. Moreover, she was becoming convinced that the little man had merely perpetrated the rather clumsy trick for the sake of advancing himself in her esteem, and to bring clearly before her the need of protecting her property more carefully.

One thing, however, *madame* could not forgive, for she was a thrifty soul.

"Zink what you have cost me by not stopping zis zing sooner! I have to get zis man to do ze work which I have put in ze hands of Steck!"

The little detective had not thought of this before. He saw now that he had virtually defrauded his employer, and it made him thoroughly miserable.

Mme. Elisée watched Steck as he wandered unhappily over to the window. He turned to glare at the cause of all his trouble—Nevins, who sat nonchalantly smoking a cigarette, and wondering why *madame* was deferring her accusation. *Madame* herself was debating whether she should carry the farce any further, or tell Steck outright that she knew he was guilty, and discharge him.

The little man crossed the room and faced her.

"Mebbe you won't want me around here no more, *madame*," he faltered. "If you do, I'd like awful well to sort o' square my carelessness by payin' for this here Burns man out o' my salary."

Elisée's desire for vengeance weakened. The evident misery of the little man, and his willingness to make restitution, appealed to her sympathies, and she determined to humiliate him no further.

She turned to Nevins.

"For me ze case she eez ended. Tell your office zat zey may send me ze bill."

Several weeks afterward, Nevins passed the Maison Elisée as he was hurrying down the avenue. Steck, clad in white silk stockings, velvet knickers, and all the gilded glory of a Fifth Avenue doorman, saluted him with excessive dignity.

"I'm doorman now," he informed the detective. "Von Bülow, the old doorman, is receivin' clerk. *Madame* figgered that as the last thief was an outsider, it was more important for me to be out here, where I could size people up as they came into the buildin'. Pretty hard to dope folks out, ain't it, Nevins—just between you an' me? But I'm makin' quite a study o' criminals, an' I reckon I'm a better detective now than I ever was. Reckon they won't many of 'em git in our store, unless they come disguised!"

## THE ROAD

INTO the distance drear and dim  
Goes the road, and I go, too,  
On to the far horizon's rim,  
Ever and ever away from you.

Yet howsoever wide we part,  
Dawn or dusk, my fond and true,  
Ever and ever my constant heart  
Backward fares on the road to you!

Clinton Scollard

# Not-Afraid

A WESTERN STORY OF STRONG MEN AND STRENUOUS DAYS

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "The Desert Trail," "Lost Wagons," etc.

## XX

THE two Heminway boys awaited Ranchester's approach with downcast eyes.

"I can't go," announced Webb, glancing up at him shamefacedly.

Ranchester's fighting eyes blazed.

"No, of course not!" he replied. "Why didn't you say so an hour ago? You'd made up your mind, right then."

"No, I hadn't," denied Webb; "but Prairie Rose is against it. She says it wouldn't be right."

"And why not, pray?" inquired Ranchester, turning his angry gaze on her.

A flush mounted up beneath the girl's tan.

"Did you kill Eddie Yaples?" she demanded of Webb. "No. Well, wouldn't that be swearing to a lie?"

"Yes, but what difference would it make?" pleaded Webb. "I went out to kill him, all right."

"Yes, and you did kill him," accused Ranchester. "I know it, and you know it. What's the use of being mealy-mouthed about it?"

"No, I didn't!" protested Webb, as Rose gazed at him anxiously. "There was somebody got ahead of me."

"Well, why isn't it all right, then, to go down and say that you did it?" argued Ranchester. "You had the intention, and when it comes to right and wrong the intention means as much as the deed. You went out to kill him, and some one beat you to it. That man was not Bill Dhue. He has assured me on his honor that he did not kill that boy. If you won't speak, you are hanging an innocent man. If you make a confession, whether you did it or not, that

will save Bill and get him a new trial. All I ask is a square deal. I'll pay for it liberally, but I want you to keep your promise."

Webb shifted his feet uneasily, glancing across at Prairie Rose, who was debating the question in her mind.

"Here comes somebody else," spoke up Leslie.

Looking up the road, they saw a horseman whipping toward them at a gallop.

"It's Al Hardigan!" exclaimed Webb.

Ranchester knew in an instant that in some way his plans had become known. Al Hardigan had learned that he was trying to win over Webb Heminway, and had come to snatch away his witness.

"Now here!" the ranchman said to Webb. "Speak quick—yes or no. Will you come with me to town for five thousand dollars, or will you stay and lose every cent?"

"Why—yes," gulped Webb. "That is, of course—"

"Don't you do it!" broke in Prairie Rose.

"You mind your own business!" snapped Ranchester.

The girl whirled on him angrily.

"You mind yours!" she said. "I guess he's my brother. If he confesses to this murder, they may take him and hang him. That's what they're going to do to Bill Dhue."

"No, they're not," declared Ranchester; "not if I can prevent it. Oh, damn it all, here comes that ass Hardigan!"

"Yes, you bet I'm coming!" panted Hardigan, stepping down from his tottering horse. "Whoa, Billy!" But his horse had sunk down. "Well, killed a horse," he observed, as the spent animal gasped for breath; "but there'll be horses after

"I'm dead. The point is, Mr. Ranchester, I'm here!"

"So I see," returned Ranchester.

"I hear," Hardigan went on, turning to Webb, "that this man is trying to get you to confess. That the fact? Well, listen to me. You confess to this murder, whether you did it or not, and they'll hang you as quick as that!"

He snapped his fingers so viciously that Webb jumped and turned pale. Prairie Rose glanced accusingly at Ranchester, who was sitting on his horse, gazing coldly into space, his eyes big with impotent rage.

"When you have finished," he said to Hardigan, "I'd like to explain to this young man the cause of your touching solicitude. He may think right now, seeing the poor horse that you've ridden to death, that you did it to save him from prison. The real reason is that you sold Dhue for a thousand dollars, and you're afraid that you'll lose the money. For a thousand dirty dollars you have sent an old comrade to be hanged, and you're afraid that the truth might clear him."

"I ain't afraid of nothing of the kind!" retorted Hardigan hotly. "I heard you had it framed to hang this boy in his place, and I think there's been enough boys killed!"

"If you're referring to Eddie Yaples, you've come to the wrong place. Just the day before the killing he tried to shoot Webb Heminway, so that bid for sympathy will fall flat."

"Flat or not," returned Hardigan, "I've come up here as an officer to warn this young man against you. You was overheard in the county jail conspiring with Bill Dhue to force this young man here to confess. Very well, if he did it, let him come through and say so, and I'll arrest him and take him to town. I'd just as soon see him hung for that thousand dollars reward as I would Bill Dhue, or any other man."

"Yes, you unprincipled scoundrel," railed Ranchester bitterly. "You'd betray your best friend for a nickel. All you want is the dirty money!"

"And I'll get it, too," replied Hardigan, pouting out his double chin and thrusting his jaw forward defiantly. "Now, young man," he went on, turning to glower at Webb, "what's the word with you on this charge? Did you kill Eddie Yaples, or was it Bill Dhue? Speak up! All we want is the truth!"

"No, sir," quavered Webb. "I never done it."

"Well, did you tell Mr. Ranchester that it was you that done it? Speak up! All we want is the truth!"

"No, sir," repeated Webb. "I never done it."

"Very well, then," observed Hardigan, "I won't place you under arrest—that is, unless Ranchester requests it."

He turned an inquiring eye on Ranchester, who answered with a disdainful smile.

"Certainly not," he said.

The ranchman was turning his horse to go when the Preacher came hurrying around the corner.

"What's all this?" he demanded, looking from one man to the other, and then back at Prairie Rose. "What are these men doing here on my land?"

"I come up here, Mr. Heminway," answered Hardigan importantly, "as a deputy sheriff and officer of the law. This gentleman is Mr. Ranchester, your good neighbor to the south, and he come up to git your boy hung."

He pointed to Webb. Heminway started back, his eyes fixed intolerantly on Ranchester.

"I can well believe it," he said in measured tones. "He has always been against me; but the first time I met him the Lord judged between us, and I have never feared him since. Yea, the Lord will requite him for his wickedness and blasphemy. God is not mocked, and the wicked man shall not prosper."

"Kindly spare us the homily," scoffed Ranchester. "Are you the vicegerent of God?"

"I am His servant," returned Heminway, letting out his big voice in a blare like the sound of a trumpet. "I must ask you, Mr. Ranchester, what you are doing on my land, when I have pointedly ordered you off of it!"

"I came up here," answered Ranchester, with biting courtesy, "to make a certain proposition to your son. We had barely come to an agreement when your daughter butted in—and then, of course, Mr. Hardigan. Being his father, you were not consulted. The deal is off, so good day!"

He gathered up his reins as if to go, but Heminway held up his hand.

"What was the proposition you made to my son?" he demanded. "Perhaps it can be reconsidered."



"I doubt it," replied Ranchester; "but if you will step down the road, I will explain it as briefly as possible. If we remained here," he added, glancing rancorously about, "I would hardly get started before your daughter and Mr. Hardigan would interrupt."

"What is it?" asked the Preacher, walking swiftly along beside him.

Ranchester grasped at a straw. After all his prayers and preaching at that memorable first meeting, when he had called on God to destroy his enemies, Levi Heminway had revealed his inner self. He had demanded damages for the hay that Ranchester's cattle had trampled and the fence that their stampede had broken down—a thousand dollars damages. Ranchester had refused to pay him; but perhaps it was not too late.

"Mr. Heminway," he said, "we've had our differences in the past—no matter about that now. I came up here this morning and offered your son a thousand dollars to do me a trifling favor. No danger was involved, and he had agreed to take the money, when your daughter horned in on the game. Now comes Al Hardigan—I trust you know his reputation—and claims I'm trying to get Webb hung; but what I ask is very little compared to the reward, which I have raised to five thousand dollars. If you like, I'll pay it to you."

"Five thousand dollars!" exclaimed Heminway, suddenly coming to a stop and regarding Ranchester with covetous eyes. Then his face became grim. "But what for, sir?" he demanded. "What for?"

"For confessing the truth," returned Ranchester gravely. "I can promise that he will be granted a full pardon. I want your son to confess that he killed Eddie Yaples."

"My son?" cried Heminway, starting back and beginning to shout. "You want him to swear away his life? Not for a thousand times that sum! May the Lord requite you for what you have done this day! I see it all now—and you are trying to use my son to save your hired murderer from his punishment. You are trying to get him hung in place of Dhue."

"Nothing of the kind!" answered Ranchester. "Bill Dhue is innocent, and in trying to save his life I am doing only what is right. He was trapped into a confession by that venal detective behind you, who claims he is trying to save your son.

Instead of that, he is trying to hang an innocent man for a paltry thousand dollars reward. You may believe him if you wish, but I know the truth, and Bill Dhue did not kill Eddie Yaples. I would rather die myself than see him hung for a crime he never committed; and that is the reason why I have come with this offer, no matter what Hardigan says."

He paused abruptly and wiped the sweat from his brow. The Preacher stepped back and smiled.

"I thank God," he said, folding his arms on his breast and regarding Ranchester triumphantly, "that at last my prayers have been answered. When I prayed for the lightning to strike you dead, the Lord withheld His hand; but this is your punishment, for your friend shall surely die, and you shall be helpless to save him!"

"He shall not!" cried Ranchester, lashing back at him with curses that cut like the blow of a whip. "You sanctimonious old hypocrite, keep your prayers to yourself, or I'll come back and ram them down your throat!"

"He shall be hung!" pronounced the Preacher, wagging his gray beard impressively. "'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord. 'I will repay.'"

"Perhaps, but I will repay you first!" replied Ranchester, and turned his horse away.

## XXI

On his tumbled couch at the Circle Dot ranch house George Ranchester lay tossing with a fever. His whole body had been poisoned by the violence of his anger, until at last he had taken to his bed. Even yet, as he writhed and turned fretfully from side to side, he grumbled and muttered to himself.

"The canting hypocrite!" he cursed. "I'll pay him for this in a way he'll not soon forget! And that hellcat of a girl masquerading as a man—there's a hereafter coming for her, too. Order me off his land, eh? I'll show him whose land it is! I'll leave it as smooth as my hand!"

He turned his face to the wall, and groaned from weakness and the sickness that had poisoned his very soul. As he lay there brooding, there came a knock at the door, repeated again and again.

"Go away!" he stormed. "Go away and leave me alone! Well, come in—what the devil is the matter with you?"

A frightened Chinese cook looked in through the doorway.

"Man here wantee see you," he said.

"Well, tell him I'm sick. Oh, for God's sake, let him in, and stop that everlasting knocking! Come in! What is it you want?"

A pale, slinking man stepped in through the door and glided over toward him.

"Are you Ranchester?" he demanded eagerly.

"Yes, I am, but I'm sick. If you've got any business, kindly go down and transact it with my foreman."

"I've got a letter from Bill Dhue," whispered the man from behind his hand.

Ranchester sat up suddenly.

"Let me have it," he said. As the man seemed to hesitate, he snatched a small package out of his hand. "What's all this?" the ranchman asked, turning over the papers it contained. "I can't make head nor tail of the thing."

"Bill wrote on old letters," explained the messenger, smiling ingratiatingly, "and slipped 'em to me while we was exercising."

"Oh, I see!" nodded Ranchester. "By the way, who are you? I don't think I've seen you before."

"I'm a feller that Afton Cunningham slipped into the jail to get some word out from Bill. They've put a watch on him now—no visitors allowed; so Cunningham comes to me, and he says to me like this:

"'Wilkinson, here's a chance to make some money. I'll have you pinched, understand, for swiping a saddle, and thrown into the county jail; and you pass the word to Bill that I sent you there, see, to frame up a jail break. Then, when you get his plans, make a sign out o' the window, and I'll have the charges dismissed.'

"Pretty smooth, if you ask me; but when Bill gimme the letters, he told me to bring 'em to you."

"Yes, yes—I see," muttered Ranchester absently.

"And he says," added Wilkinson, "you'd slip me a hundred dollars. That's all right, ain't it, mister?"

"Yes, yes," frowned Ranchester. "Hold your tongue for a minute."

He went on poring over the notes. They were scrawled with a stub of pencil on the backs of old envelopes, some addressed to him, and some to the messenger, but all giving directions for the jail break. They were hectic and disjointed, evidently writ-

ten from day to day, but undated and half illegible. One of them read thus:

Tell the boys you know exactly what to do and how to do it. All they will have to do is furnish the stuff. Make your talk strong. They are all right, but I can't see them, and my lawyers don't want me to see them. All they think about is getting more fees. To hell with 'em! I must get out of here, or I'll be hung.

"What is it you want?" Ranchester asked the messenger.

Wilkinson sat down on the bed.

"It's this way," he said. "I'm a soup man, see—I blow safes, and that kind of stuff. Over here on this paper it tells what to do. Read that"—and he pointed to a smudged sheet.

Ranchester deciphered Bill Dhue's instructions thus:

Get five sticks of forty-per-cent dynamite, and hang them against the wall. There's an old door on the west side that's been bricked up. Hang them there, light the fuse, and beat it. I exercise between six and half past six. Blow the wall in, and I will escape. Make it strong, boys—use six sticks of dynamite. If you get this O. K., put a rock on the window sill of the office across the street. I can see that from my cell. Put it there on the day the break will come off. Make it strong, if you blow the whole jail down. Have a horse across the street behind that church, with a six-shooter, grub, and money on the saddle. Once outside this jail, these officers will never get sight of my dust.

"By God," exclaimed Ranchester, "we'll do it!"

"And he says," went on the yegg, "that you'll gimme a hundred dollars to go up to the mines and buy powder. That's O. K., ain't it, Mr. Ranchester?"

"Damn it, yes!" burst out Ranchester. "Stop talking about your money! You'll be paid, and paid well, for your trouble. Now come along with me, and we'll go back to Cheyenne and get this thing started at once."

"Not with you, mister," objected Wilkinson. "Them officers all know me, and they might twig the whole business, see? You ride on the plush and I'll swing under on the rods, and we'll meet outside the station, when we git there."

"Quite right," nodded Ranchester. "I see you're an old hand. Ever do a job like this before?"

"No-o," admitted the yegg, "not exactly like this, but I'm there when it comes to dynamite. Mr. Cunningham picked me up, and I took my orders from him, but Bill Dhue says to come to you. If I pull this,

Bill says, there's five thousand dollars in it that he'll collect from some of these rich cattlemen."

"He can collect that much from me," said Ranchester.

The ranchman got up to put on his clothes. His sickness had left him, and, though his limbs were still weak, he harnessed up and drove rapidly to the railroad. The evening train took him and Wilkinson to Cheyenne, where they sought and found Afton Cunningham.

"What's all this?" Cunningham inquired, when Ranchester beckoned him from a saloon and led him to a room up the street. When he saw the yegg, Cunningham glanced at him sharply, and then turned to look at Ranchester. "What's that man doing here with you?" he demanded suspiciously.

The yegg instantly became garrulous.

"It was this way, Mr. Cunningham," he explained. "Bill Dhue, you understand, he told me different. He wrote me out some letters, but he says don't come to you—he says to take 'em to Ranchester. So I swung under the rattler and beats it up to Thunder Mountain—"

"And I brought him back here," ended Ranchester.

"Oh, very well, Mr. Ranchester!" flared up Cunningham. "If you want to take this out of my hands, you're welcome. I suppose you're not satisfied—is that it?"

"No, I'm perfectly satisfied," replied Ranchester. "Don't take any offense, old man. Bill just happened to send him to me, but I brought him right down here, because I realized you had your plans all laid."

"Well, I have," grumbled Cunningham; "but if this is going to be pulled off, it's going to be pulled off by me. Otherwise you can take this yegg and swing the deal yourself."

"Never mind, now," soothed Ranchester. "I'm satisfied."

"And if you or anybody else presumes to dictate to me, or tries to run it over me, I'll—"

"Yes, yes, Cunningham—I understand," broke in Ranchester.

"And you, you hophead!" cursed Cunningham, suddenly turning on the cringing yegg. "Get this now, and get it straight—you're working for *me*. Otherwise you're fired—understand?"

"All right, mister," replied Wilkinson.

"Here's the letters from Bill Dhue. He slipped 'em to me while we was exercising."

Cunningham grabbed the papers roughly. As he held them to the light, Ranchester could see that his hands trembled violently. He read over the letters, scowling and blinking as he studied the words out. Then he turned and jerked his head fiercely at Wilkinson.

"You get out of here," he ordered, "and come back in half an hour. Don't you listen through that keyhole," he added. "Now, then," he said, when the two ranchmen were alone, "let's come to a showdown, Mr. Ranchester. If you don't trust my judgment, I want to know it, right now. If you do—hands off! Understand?"

"I understand," replied Ranchester quietly.

"And if you think for a minute you can pull this play off better—"

"Not at all—not at all. Let's get to business."

"The business is this," stated Cunningham. "I've got a carefully arranged plan for pulling off this jail break. It's the last chance that Bill Dhue has, and it's got to be handled quietly, without arousing any more suspicion, or it'll land us all in jail. I'm doing the fixing, and I'm game to take the chances, but I won't be interfered with in the least. Certain men must be approached, certain money must be passed, and I won't give an accounting to any one. Are you game to put up the money?"

"How much?" inquired Ranchester guardedly.

"Ten thousand dollars, and you can take the offer or leave it. All I say is, it's Bill Dhue's last chance."

"What do you plan to do—blow in the side of the building? That man seems kind of twitchy, Afton."

"He's my man," retorted Cunningham. "Didn't he bring out this message? Well, I've picked him to blow in the wall."

"I'm not questioning your judgment, but mightn't it be better to pay him off and get another man?"

"That's your privilege," replied Cunningham. "You can fire him, if you want to—but when you fire him, you fire me."

"I'm afraid of him," muttered Ranchester anxiously.

"He's a professional safe cracker—blowed hundreds of safes, and claims he knows all about dynamite. Make up your mind—I'm through!"

He folded his arms and stood waiting his answer.

Ranchester remained in deep thought. Should he trust Bill Dhue's life in the hands of a safe blower and of this man who stood leering before him? Afton Cunningham had been drinking, and in his first outburst of anger he had called Wilkinson a hop-head; yet if Ranchester refused their assistance, they would both turn against him, and the jail break would be balked at the start.

"Tell me your plans," he said to Cunningham. "If I believe they are practicable, I'll put up the ten thousand dollars."

"They're practicable," returned Cunningham; "but I won't tell them to any one. All you've got to do is to give me the money and string out a relay of horses. In three weeks' time Bill is due to be hung. They've placed a strong guard over the jail; but give me ten thousand dollars, and no questions asked, and I'll guarantee to turn the trick."

"You are quite certain," inquired Ranchester, "that every detail will be attended to—that this man won't weaken in the pinch? I'll place that powder myself, if you just say the word. Come on—let me do something, Afton!"

"You give me that money and get out of town. If you want to do something, do that."

"Very well!" assented Ranchester, and wrote out the check; but as he passed out his eyes were grim.

## XXII

LIKE a man in a fevered dream, Ranchester hurried back to his ranch to arrange a relay of horses for Bill Dhue's escape. Sleeping and waking, his mind was on the prisoner under sentence of death. Every morning, when he got up, he looked down the road, hoping to see a streamer of dust and Bill whipping toward him in full flight; but the days dragged by, and in the silence of waiting Ranchester was plagued by suspicions and doubts. A dozen times he leaped on his saddle horse to ride down and demand action at once; but each time he turned back and set his teeth to wait, for Cunningham had assigned him his part.

Yet, as he sat there and waited, he imagined Cunningham drinking, passing loutishly from saloon to saloon; and behind him, like a shadow, the thin-faced, spiritless yeggman, dancing attendance on his

employer's every whim. And meanwhile, in the jail, Bill Dhue was counting off the days and looking for the stone on the window sill.

In a day and a night Ranchester could have assembled what Dhue had asked for, and blown in the side of the jail; but already eight days had dragged by, each an infinity in itself, and no news had come, good or bad.

The world seemed to have whirled on through æons of time, and every second an agony. At night, in terrified dreams, he saw Bill walking to the scaffold, his elbows pinioned behind him, while Cunningham, Al Hardigan, and a host of strange men pushed him forward. It was Ranchester's fever coming back, and as his temperature mounted he hardly knew the facts from his dreams. Yet he could not rest an instant, but paced constantly to and fro, stroking his horses, examining their saddles, watching the road.

Then the end came as he had dreamed it—a streak of dust in the distance, a rider, leaning forward as he rode; but it was not Bill Dhue. When the messenger drew rein, he handed Ranchester a newspaper in silence. The ranchman's eye fell upon a shrieking headline:

## ATTEMPTED JAIL BREAK FOILED!

Ranchester threw the paper down with an oath. Then he snatched it up again, hurrying madly through the verbiage to get the kernel of truth. The yegg had got drunk, and had revealed an alleged plot to the reporter on an evening paper. A hasty search had actually revealed a gunny-sack full of dynamite hung up against the wall of the jail. All that was needed was the touch of a match to have caused a tremendous explosion.

Ranchester threw it down again, shouting curses at the bungler, raising his fists in helpless rage to the blue sky; and then, half from habit, he cursed God in a frenzy, and dared him to strike him dead. He drew a circle and stepped inside of it, as in happier days he had been wont to do when it thundered; and with fists still upraised he called on God, if there was a God, to come down and prove it.

Even as he was blaspheming, he remembered the Preacher's words—that his punishment was to see Bill Dhue hung. God had spared him for that. He had withheld His lightning, and Bill would surely die.



"He shall not!" screamed Ranchester, and fell to the ground as if struck by an unseen hand.

When he awoke, he was changed, though in what way he could hardly tell; but something had happened in that paroxysm of uncontrolled rage that had left him a different man. He was weak, deathly weak, and a black despair had laid hold of him, weighing him down with terrifying thoughts. He could not even curse, for all his savage rage had left him.

He wondered if the Preacher had spoken true. Was it possible that a man so self-righteous and bigoted could speak for God Himself? And was there a God, to punish Ranchester's blasphemy by the cruel death of his friend? He lay in grim silence, turning these questions over in his mind, while the soft-footed Chinaman waited on him.

His doubts were still unanswered when another letter came and brought the strength back to his limbs. It was a note from Bill Dhue, written to pass the eyes of his jailers, yet voicing a last appeal for help.

DEAR MAJOR:

The sheriff tells me it will soon be all over with me, except the applause part of the game. My lawyers have ditched me, and I'm due to hang next week, unless the Governor grants me a reprieve. I have been informed that it might do me some good to tell all I know, but I can't figure out who would believe anything I said.

I have had a new experience, major. I have become a Christian—an honest one, I hope—and I'm prepared to meet my God. At the same time, I hate to be hung for something I never done, and that's what they're trying to do. Al Hardigan is so scared he won't get that reward money that he watches me day and night.

I want you to believe me when I tell you again I never killed Eddie Yaples. This is the truth, as I am going to die in ten days, and I wanted to let you know.

It would perhaps be somewhat of a trying meeting for you to come and see me that last day. Do as you like. I'm not going to weaken, but I don't want to cause you any pain. I know you have done your best, so don't feel bad about it.

Good-by, my friend—that's all.

BILL DHUE.

Ranchester read the letter again and laid it down softly. Bill Dhue a Christian, and preparing to die!

He rose up and fought away the thought. Bill was not dead yet. No, and Ranchester would not let him die. He would go to the Governor once more. But no—some secret influence, some sinister, unseen hand, had reached to the highest places. The Governor refused to discuss the subject

until the Supreme Court had decided; and to approach a judge to influence his decision would be suicidal.

It was a deadlock, and purposely left so. The same influence which had jumped the trial to the head of the calendar, and had had Dhue tried and convicted in a few weeks, had slowed down the wheels of justice to their customary grind, holding them back for some purpose obscurely hid.

Could it be that the cattlemen who had hired Dhue for years, and whose secrets he was able to disclose, were planning some desperate coup to save his life at the last minute, in spite of the popular clamor? Or had they, more desperately, planned to cut off his life, hanging him swiftly with his secrets untold?

Ranchester rose up from his bed and reached resolutely for his clothes, for the time had come to act. It was life or death now, and they were hanging an innocent man—but one way lay open to him yet.

For one brief hour he had held victory in his hand, and then a woman had shattered his hopes. Webb Heminway had confessed that he had gone out to kill Eddie Yaples; he had agreed to confess to it all; and then, as if an invisible skein had drawn him back from his resolution, he had asserted his innocence and refused to speak. But the facts were the same, and human nature was the same—why not go back and try it once more?

Ranchester tottered out unsteadily and swung up on his horse. As he rode, his lost strength returned. The deadly apathy left him, and he felt a new hope within him. His friend should not die!

If there was a God, and Bill was a Christian, that was all the more reason to spare him; but if there was not, he, Ranchester, would take God's place. He would seek out the guilty and save the life of the innocent. God or no God, he would fight for his friend.

But the fates were against him, for, as he dipped down into Thunder Basin, he met Prairie Rose in the road. There was a clatter of hoofs behind him, a band of horses went rushing past, and in their wake followed Prairie Rose. He reined out of the road to let her go by, but the woman in her barked him again. As she came up beside him, she noted his wan face, and stopped her horse in his tracks.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Are you sick?"

"No, I am quite well, thank you," he answered stiffly. "Don't let me detain you, Miss Heminway."

"Oh, you're not detaining me," she said. "I was just driving those horses off the rim. Come on down here to the spring."

She spurred ahead impulsively. As he followed along behind her, Ranchester shook his head and smiled wryly. He was weak, he had to admit; but what had sapped the last of his strength was the sight of Prairie Rose herself. It had brought boding fears to his heart.

Yet, since he had met her instead of Webb, he was determined to make the best of it; and perhaps, after all, it was for the best. Sooner or later, following her nature, she would take charge of the proceedings and tell Webb whether to go or to stay. Why not have it out with her now,

The ranchman dismounted at the spring and took a drink of the cold water that gushed out from among the stones. Then, seeing her watching him, he steadied himself gently and sat down against the bank.

"You've been sick," she said, almost accusingly.

"Even so, what does it matter?" he sighed. "You look the picture of health."

She stepped down from her horse. As she knelt to drink, he noticed again how ragged she was. Her battered sombrero had been stitched along the rim; and beneath the man's jumper he spied a faded shirt, which also had been made for a man. Except for her long hair and delicately shaped hands, she had lost all outward semblance of a woman; and something in her walk, as she strode about in the worn chaps, reminded him uncomfortably of a cowboy.

When she glanced up, however, reading the disapproval in his grim eyes, he realized once more that she was a woman. Beneath her coat of tan a rosy red flush mounted up, and her dark eyes suffused with tears. For a moment she looked at him, and then she turned away.

Ranchester was quick to make amends.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that I owe you an apology for the rough way I spoke the other day; but I see you don't hold it against me."

"No, I don't," she answered tartly. "I'm used to it."

"What I mean is," he explained, "that when you thought I was sick, you were kind enough to take me to this spring."

"Oh!" she murmured, and nodded shortly.

"I am a little weak," he admitted, "having just got up from a sick bed. I had some kind of a fever, I don't know what, but I'm sure I'll be all right now."

She glanced at him inquiringly, but did not offer to go, and he took it for a good omen.

"I wonder," he began, with the ghost of a smile, "if you meant all you said the other day. I'll admit I was a little nettled when I found you had interfered and prevented Webb from keeping his promise. I apologize for anything I may have said, but I hope you don't think that I had any intention of getting Webb into trouble. Now that we happen to be together, we might as well talk this over frankly, because I'm going down to see your brother again. I'm sure, if you knew all the angles of the case, you would advise Webb to go back with me and confess. That is what I would do if I were in his position, and I don't see how you can wish otherwise. Of course, he's your brother, and you naturally want to protect him; but that's just the way I feel about Bill Dhue. If he had killed Eddie Yaples, I wouldn't feel so bad about it; but honestly, it's driving me mad. I can't sleep from thinking that in ten days he'll be hung, unless I do something to save him."

He passed his hand over his brow, and she regarded him anxiously, though the look in her eyes never changed. She was against him, and Ranchester knew it.

"I wouldn't have to come to you," he continued wearily, "if I could get a fair hearing in Cheyenne; but there's not a man there, from the Governor down, that will look at this case on its merits. They're all in a conspiracy to get Bill hung. They won't even grant him a new trial. Now I'm not asking any favors that I'm not willing to pay for, and in this case you can set your own price; but I want you, Miss Heminway, to use your influence with your brother to get him to confess what he's done. All I ask is for simple justice. If you'll do this much for me, I'll—I'll never forget it, Prairie Rose!"

He gazed at her pleadingly, and, when he called her Prairie Rose, his voice suddenly changed and grew gentle. For a moment he seemed to step outside of his austere self, and to stand before her almost as a lover. There was about him an appeal

that made her heart beat strangely, but she shook her head and looked away.

"I don't want to argue with you," she said; "but I can't do what you say. It isn't right. I know we are poor, and need the money you would give us; but Webb is my brother, and if he confessed to the murder I'm afraid—I'm afraid they might hang him."

"No, they won't! They can't!" he insisted. "You know yourself he would get off. Didn't Eddie try to shoot him? And think of the provocation! All I want is a new trial for Bill. If he killed Eddie Yables, I'm willing that he should suffer for it; but they trapped him into a confession, and, now that they've got him convicted, the Supreme Court won't give him another chance. If Webb would confess just what he did, and no more, then they'd have to give Bill a new trial. If you'll get him to do so, I'll be your debtor for life. Anything that I've got, you can have."

"I don't want it," she said. "This isn't a matter of money. The time has come when your money will buy you nothing; and I'm glad of it, after all that you've done. When you came through our meadow with all your cattle, and drove off our horses and cows, you laughed at my father when he stood out and prayed and asked God to look down and punish you. Then you and Afton Cunningham hired Bill Dhue to come in here and drive all us settlers out. Maybe he didn't kill Eddie Yables, but didn't he kill Murray and Chris Klein? You know it just as well as I do! Bill Dhue is a murderer, and he deserves to be hung—and you deserve to be punished. God is not mocked, after all, and while I'm sorry to see you suffer—"

"Oh, of all the sickening cant!" exploded Ranchester. "Do you actually believe what you say?"

"Yes, I do!" she declared. "I knew from the first that some terrible punishment would come to you. You treated us like dirt, and when father prayed—"

"Now look here!" he broke in. "You seem to be a sensible girl, except when you're on this subject. In all his life, while he's been trying to pray men dead, did your father ever have a prayer answered? I don't mean equivocally, or in some round-about way."

"Yes, he did," she answered decidedly. "When we were back in Nebraska, he borrowed some money, and the banker tried

to take away our property. Father prayed all the time for nearly a month, and then the banker was struck blind. He was sitting at his desk in the bank."

"Yes, but did your father pray to have him struck blind, or did he pray to have him struck dead?"

"He prayed to have him punished," replied Prairie Rose resolutely. "And he was punished—worse than he dreamed of. It isn't so bad to be just struck dead."

"You're begging the question," argued Ranchester. "If you seize upon every affliction to which human flesh is heir—"

"I don't care—you'll be punished!" she interrupted. "You're being punished now, and you'll keep on being punished until you repent and ask forgiveness. You ought to be ashamed of hiring Bill Dhue to shoot down people from ambush. I guess, when he comes out and tells all he knows—"

"Dhue will never do that," contradicted Ranchester.

"Well, why won't he?" she demanded hotly.

"Because," he replied, "strange as it may seem to you, Bill Dhue is a man of honor. He'll go further for a friend than all the psalm-singing hypocrites in the world. That's my test of a man—what he'll do for his friends; and it's my test of a woman, too."

He rose up grimly and went to his horse. Prairie Rose stared in alarm. In that moment of defeat he had suddenly become old and stooping. When he mounted, he sat swaying on his horse; but his eyes, once so debonair, were bleak and forbidding, and he looked down at her with an angry scowl.

"You've hung Bill Dhue!" he blazed forth. "Just as surely as if you'd been there and sprung the trap under him, you've hung him—and all from your petty woman's spite. If you had just said the word, or even minded your own business—"

"But it was my own business," she flared back.

"I've never seen a woman yet," he said, "that would keep where she belonged. You've meddled in everything, and now, as a result of it—"

"And I've never seen a man," she came back spitefully, "that ever thought about anybody but himself! Just to save Bill Dhue—"

"That's enough!" he cried, holding his hand up for silence. "I'm too sick to listen



to your chatter. My friend must die—let that be sufficient, and I hope it makes you happy. To all this damned cant about repentance and punishment I have only one thing to say. If there is a God, He will punish you as you deserve for taking the life of my friend. If there isn't, as I truly and firmly believe, I'll take on the job myself. I will punish you. That is all. Good day!"

He bowed almost decorously, and touched spurs to his horse. Prairie Rose broke down and cried.

### XXIII

ON his bunk in the steel cell where he awaited the day of his death, Bill Dhue sat poring over a Bible; but the print was too fine for the gloomy prison light, and he laid the book down reluctantly.

Around the street from the jail a merry-go-round had been set up. As he lay there listening, he could hear the whistle blow and the steam calliope begin its one tune. Day and night for a week it had played "La Paloma," oblivious of him and his fate. As he heard the familiar pipings, the urge to live came back to him, and he rose up and began pacing his cell.

"La Paloma"—how often in moonlit Mexican plazas had he heard its haunting strains, and, beneath the strum of guitars and the deep notes of viols, the shuffling of sandaled feet. How often, through the shadows, had he watched the *señoritas* and caught the flash of laughing black eyes! And now, in his prime, he was to be cut off from it all—cut off from life itself.

His paces grew faster as the old thoughts came back to him, and he began to plot desperately to escape. Three times within a month, when the vacant cell next to him had happened to have an occupant, he had laid plans for a break—a dash at the guard; but each time the plot had been foiled. Two men had betrayed him, the third had been removed, and now Al Hardigan was watching him.

The death watch was set, and as Dhue glanced out through the grating he saw Hardigan approaching.

"What 'll it be, Bill?" inquired Al, in the quiet, impersonal way that he used in talking to his prisoner.

Choking down the black hate that leaped up in his heart, Bill Dhue went over to the door. Al Hardigan held the key that unlocked that cell of death, and his was the

hand that must set Dhue at liberty or lead him forth to be hung. Like a man who has caught a king cobra asleep and plunged it into a cage, Al Hardigan watched Bill Dhue, knowing well that the slightest slip would mean a dash to escape. And if Dhue got loose, the first man he would kill would be the one who had trapped him.

"Nothing, Al," he said, "unless you can stop that merry-go-round. That tune has got on my nerves."

"Can't do it," rumbled Hardigan. "He's leased the lot for a month. Ever see one of these guns before?"

He drew out a blunt-nosed pistol, with one barrel under the other, and the handle set on almost at right angles. Dhue stared at it, open-eyed.

"What kind of a hog's leg is that?" he asked.

Hardigan grinned knowingly.

"This is one of them new automatics," he said. "Fires ten shots as fast as a man can pull the trigger, and is sighted up to a thousand yards."

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Dhue incredulously.

"Shoots a hole plumb through a cottonwood tree, and kills on the other side."

"How does it work?" inquired Dhue curiously.

"Never you mind about that," replied Hardigan. "It works, and don't you forget it!"

He thrust the weapon back into its holster, and went pounding down the iron stairs, while Bill Dhue resumed his pacing. The sight of the pistol, held so tantalizingly before his eyes, had roused the old lust to kill. He lashed back and forth like a tiger in its cage when it catches the smell of hot blood; but at the clang of the inner door he stopped in his tracks, and looked out to see a new prisoner coming in.

The newcomer was a big man like Dhue himself, tall and rangy and full of fight, and a deputy United States marshal walked beside him. Bill watched them intently as the prisoner was led up the stairs and thrust inside the steel door. Then, when the man had been locked in the cell beside Bill's own, Dhue rose up and regarded him with curiosity.

Twice already in his brief incarceration they had put stool-pigeons in that cell to spy on him; but one look at the grim face of this Federal prisoner convinced Dhue that he was a desperate man.



"What you in for?" he asked.

The man gazed hard at him.

"Train robbing—United States mail."

"That's from twenty years to life," nodded Dhue. "I'm sentenced to be hung, myself."

"You're Bill Dhue, eh? I've heard of you;" and the new prisoner looked him over appraisingly.

"Are you game?" whispered Dhue from behind his hand.

"For anything," answered the outlaw briefly. "My name's Kennedy. You might 've heard of me."

"Many's the time" grinned Dhue. "Stopping long?"

"Over Sunday—while the deputy gits drunk."

Dhue looked down the stairway and up and down the jail, then stepped back and put his mouth close.

"They's stools down below us," he whispered. "Don't talk till that merry-go-round starts up."

They waited in tense silence until the shrill whistle of the starter summoned a blare from the raucous steam calliope. Then, mouth to ear, they talked back and forth, stopping abruptly at the last piping note.

"You play sick," instructed Dhue. "I've got it all figured out. That big fat man is Al Hardigan, my guard. He's the son of a goat that framed me, and he thinks he's going to hang me—took the job to touch off the drop. You stay with me, pardner, and we'll rush him at the door and make a clean git-away with his keys. I'll jest stop long enough to kill him!" added Bill.

When the music started again, Dhue continued his instructions.

"To-morrow's Sunday. Everything is quiet—no deputies around. No court, you understand, and no call for prisoners. We'll lay for him in the morning, after breakfast. These are interlocking doors—both open at once when he pulls that lever outside; but the outer door opens with a key. You play sick after breakfast. Ask him to bring you a pitcher of hot water, and we'll jump him when he sets it inside."

They talked back and forth out of the corners of their mouths, their eyes on the lookout for spies. When evening came, Kennedy lay back on his bunk, moaning faintly, and refusing his food.

"What's the matter with you?" Hardi-

gan demanded roughly, jerking open the steel door, after locking both their cells from the outside.

The train robber looked up from his bunk.

"I'm sick," he answered.

"Aw, you just think you're sick!" grumbled Hardigan, and went out with the untouched meal.

But in the morning, when he saw the prisoner's breakfast untasted, he went in and peered through the door. Kennedy was lying on his couch, huddled up under a blanket, and this time he did not even look up.

"Anything special you want?" Hardigan asked at last, and Kennedy stirred and groaned.

"I've got the belly-ache," he complained. "I wish you'd bring me a pitcher of hot water."

Hardigan grunted and went out, carrying the uneaten breakfast. Dhue and Kennedy listened as he clumped down the stairs. The inner door clanged behind him as he went back to the kitchen, and the prisoners straightened up with a jerk.

"Wait till you hear him set down the pitcher," whispered Dhue, and the train robber nodded and lay back.

Once more the inner door clanged, and with slow and ponderous steps Al Hardigan mounted the stairs with his pitcher. Breakfast having been served, he had unlocked the sliding doors that gave the prisoners access to the runway; and now, without thinking, he unlocked the outer door and slipped the pitcher inside.

"Here's your water!" he called.

With a pounce like a leaping lion, Bill Dhue hurled himself against the door. At the impact of his body Hardigan staggered backward, clutching the railing of the gangway to keep from falling. The next instant the train robber added his weight to Dhue's, almost knocking the keeper off the gangway.

"I've got 'im!" panted Bill Dhue, grabbing his enemy by the throat.

As they grappled on the stairway, Kennedy leaped on top of them, and they went bumping and tumbling to the bottom. For all his heavy paunch, Al Hardigan fought back with a rugged strength that surprised them. The three men struggled on the floor, while the other prisoners yelled and hammered on the doors of their cells. First Dhue was on top, and then Hardigan got

to his feet, to be pounced on by the desperate train robber; but in the end weight told, and, with Dhue still at his throat, Hardigan relaxed and gave up the fight.

"Git his keys!" directed Dhue.

As Kennedy reached for his pockets, Hardigan suddenly regained his voice.

"No use, boys," he gasped. "They're locked up in the safe. You're trapped, so you might as well give up!"

"Trapped — hell!" retorted Dhue. "Don't you know the combination? Well, come out here and open it up!"

He jerked Hardigan to his feet, and, with Kennedy to help him, rushed the struggling officer down the corridor. When they entered the empty office, Kennedy let go of Hardigan and made a jump for a rifle in the rack.

"Now!" he said, with a curse, jabbing the muzzle against Hardigan. "You open up that safe, and open it quick, or I'll blow the top of your head off!"

"All right, boys," panted Hardigan, kneeling down before the safe.

As they stood over him, trembling with excitement, he began to fumble at the combination, puffing and struggling to get back his breath.

"Somebody's been fooling with this safe," he complained, as his first efforts failed to open the door. "Gimme a chance, boys!"

With every appearance of frantic haste, he spun the disk back and forth.

"You can't stall on me!" burst out Kennedy, suddenly sensing Al Hardigan's intent. "Open that safe, or I'll blow your brains out! He's playing for time, Bill!"

"Here! Gimme that gun!" answered Dhue.

Hardigan opened the door, but, instead of the keys, he grabbed out his automatic pistol and whirled to shoot them down. There was a thud as Kennedy's gun barrel descended on his head.

As Bill Dhue leaped upon him and tried to wrench away the pistol, the jail keys fell out of Hardigan's pocket, where they had been hidden all the time. The train robber saw them fall, and snatched them up with an oath, leaving Dhue still wrestling for the pistol. Without a second look he started for the door, then leaped back and threw up his rifle.

There was a rattle of heavy keys, and the jail door swung open, letting in the startled undersheriff.

"Put 'em up!" ordered Kennedy.

At sight of the outlaw's gun, the undersheriff ducked back and ran. Kennedy darted out after him, turning to rush out by the back way as he heard shots and yells from the front.

Meanwhile, back in the office, Dhue and Hardigan fought and scrambled, still fighting for the automatic pistol. Grasping it firmly in both hands, Hardigan crouched on the floor, and fired twice as he jerked the gun loose; but each time Dhue, riding him down from behind, twisted his gun hand farther back. Bill grabbed the pistol with one hand, and had almost jerked it loose when Hardigan feigned to give up.

"Well, if you want the gun," he said, "quit twisting my hand, and I'll give it to you!"

Dhue gave a final wrench and then relaxed his grip. Hardigan let go of the gun; but as he handed it over, he pushed up the safety catch, and made a quick jump to one side. Down came the gun, and as he saw his enemy over the barrel Bill Dhue pulled the trigger twice, but the pistol failed to explode.

"Damn the hog's leg!" he cursed, and rushed out of the building.

The fire bell was ringing furiously. Men were running to and fro with shotguns and pistols, all shouting, all looking on every side; and as he dodged out by the back door, which Kennedy had left open, Dhue became a part of the riot. It was a general alarm, but he still had a chance, and he rushed to get the sheriff's horse.

Day and night Sheriff Adams kept a horse saddled and bridled in the stable just behind the jail. Dhue was running for the door, when, looking up the alley, he saw the sheriff crouching behind a post. His pistol was out, but it was pointed the other way, and as Dhue stopped short he fired.

Dhue saw a man on a horse suddenly collapse and go down, and he knew that Kennedy had been shot; but there was still a chance for himself. Ducking around the corner, he started up the street on the run.

It was the same broad street that led northward out of town, toward Thunder Mountain and the Circle Dot; but his fight with Hardigan had left Dhue panting and wind-broken, and he staggered at every step.

An excited man rushed up to him, brandishing a rifle and yelling. Dhue nodded and pointed up the street.

"Bill Dhue's out!" the fugitive shouted, and the man ran past, while Dhue kept on to the north.

It was only a half a block till he came to the vacant lot where the merry-go-round was located. He halted, breathing heavily, his eyes roving wildly, and at that moment the engineer stepped out—the man who had run the calliope.

"Throw up your hands!" he yelled, catching sight of the escaping prisoner.

As Dhue turned to run, the engineer fired. Dhue felt the bullet pass, and tottered along up the street, with his pursuer shouting behind him. The engineer was a little man in a greasy skullcap, and his pistol was scarcely more than a popgun; but as he came in pursuit he seemed more terrible and vindictive than any man Bill Dhue had ever known.

"Throw up your hands!" he yelled, and fired again.

Bill Dhue stumbled and fell, but he was not hit. His legs had simply crumpled beneath him, and he rose up, pointing his automatic. Three times he pulled the trigger, each time harder and harder, and then the little man fired back. The small-calibered bullet struck Dhue on the head, just grazing the top of his scalp, and he fell forward like a dead man. All his strength was gone. He could not move a hand, and the engineer leaped upon him. Raising his empty pistol, he beat Dhue furiously over the head with it.

As the prisoner was stumbling to his knees, Al Hardigan rushed up and laid him low with a gun barrel. That was the end for Bill Dhue. When he recovered consciousness, he was back in the death cell, and many eyes stared in at him curiously.

#### XXIV

IN the street outside the jail, a crowd of men with guns and pistols had gathered at the ringing of the fire bell; and though the prisoners had been recaptured, the bell still rang, while excited citizens shot off their six-shooters. Rumors swept through the crowd like wind through the grass, swaying them hither and thither with vindictive fury; but the mob lacked a head until Phi Yaples appeared, riding bareback on his buckskin horse. A heavy white bandage still incased his right arm, and his eyes were dancing mad.

"They turned him out!" he yelled, shaking his fist at the jail door. "What kind

of a sheriff is that? They turned him loose, I tell ye, and I don't believe they got him back! It's them cattlemen—they're skeered he'll blab!"

He spurred up toward the door of the sheriff's office, now bristling with militia bayonets. As the crowd opened up to let him pass, he continued his wild tirade.

"Let 'em show me Bill Dhue! I want to see him—that's all! I don't believe he's thar. They've turned him loose, I tell ye, before he blabs all he knows, and puts all those cattlemen in jail. They're the devils that hired him, and they think they own this jail, but it belongs to you and me. We pay the taxes in this county, and we're entitled to be represented and to see that justice is done. What kind of justice is that when Bill Dhue is turned loose less'n a week before he's to be hung? Didn't I tell ye from the first this jail would never hold him? And hyer he was, runnin' around the streets! The thing to do is hang him now. Ain't he confessed he killed my Eddie? Well, why don't you hang him, then?"

An answering roar went up from the crowd. A rush of men surged forward toward the steel door, but at sight of the bayonets and the armed guards behind it the leaders came to a halt.

"Stand back!" warned the sheriff, looking out through the steel bars. "You'll never get Bill Dhue!"

He gave way immediately to the district attorney, who had been hastily smuggled inside. At sight of the man who had convicted the prisoner, the crowd set up a cheer. He began to speak, advising the mob against violence, and promising that justice should be done; and soon, despite the hooting and harangues of Phi Yaples, the crowd turned away and dispersed.

All Cheyenne was still in a turmoil, however. As the day of the execution drew near, the militia stood guard outside the jail. No visitors were allowed to pass through the lines until they had been searched for arms; and so, one by one, the days dragged by until Friday morning dawned.

It was a cold, bleak day, with no sun in the east to thrust its fingers through the high jail windows. After a restless night, Bill Dhue rose early and ate his last breakfast in silence. Since the day of his recapture he had given up all hope of leaving his prison alive.

As the tall, frocked form of a minister appeared, Bill greeted him with a smile. Face to face with death, his thoughts had leaped ahead, inevitably, to what was beyond; and now, with a faith as naïve as it was honest, he knelt down in his cell to pray. His rugged heart was tamed, and, as the minister pleaded for mercy, he raised his man-killing hands to God.

As he knelt there in silence, he heard a step on the stairway, and rose up to meet the stern eyes of Ranchester.

"Bill," the ranchman began, his voice broken with emotion, "the Governor has refused a reprieve. I have worked day and night, but there's something behind this. There's something that I can't put my hand on."

"Yes, major," replied Dhue, "I've known it from the first. I think it's a punishment for my sins."

"Your sins!" scoffed Ranchester. "What the hell are you talking about? Oh, I beg your pardon!"

He bowed. For the first time he noticed the clergyman.

"Let you out, sir?" inquired the guard, stepping alertly forward.

To the clang of steel and the grinding of locks, the minister gave way to Ranchester. The ranchman strode into the narrow cell, his face drawn with pain. Bill Dhue stared at him, startled.

"You've been sick, major," said Bill. "My God, what's come over you? You ain't been worrying over me?"

"I can't sleep," answered Ranchester. "There's something I can't understand, Bill—something that's keeping you from getting a reprieve. They all take it for granted I ought to know what it is, but not a man will tell me; and I can't make them move—not an inch!"

"It's them lawyers," returned Dhue. "They've crooked me. I was tried, convicted, and hung before I even left the ranch. But don't take on, major—it's all right."

He laid a comforting hand on the drooping shoulder of his friend, and went on with a steady voice.

"It's a punishment," he said. "It's a punishment for my sins. Major, I'm prepared to die. I've known all along I'd never git away—there was always some little thing that kept me, like that catch on Hardigan's pistol. Think of me, major—*me*, with a loaded gun in my hand, and

not knowing how to shoot it! Al showed me that gun the day before the break, but he wouldn't show me how it worked; and that little engineer with his thirty-two pea shooter run up and cracked me over the head! There's something against me, major, and I think it's the hand of God, reaching down to punish me for my sins."

"You do?" exclaimed Ranchester, and laughed harshly. "Don't listen to these preachers—that's all cant!"

"No, it isn't," insisted Dhue. "I used to be like you are, but I've changed. I'm a Christian now; and do you know, major, since I've learned the power of prayer, I've wondered about that preacher man up on Chug."

"Wondered what about him?" inquired Ranchester uneasily.

"Well, you know yourself how he could pray—"

"Oh, nonsense!" burst out Ranchester impatiently.

"Yes, and you know," went on Dhue, "how he said we'd be punished for feeding him out like we did. I was in on that myself."

"No, you weren't! He was praying against me."

"Well, anyhow," ended Dhue, "it's all right with me; but don't make any more of them circles, major."

His voice suddenly became soft. As Ranchester met his friend's eyes, the ranchman reached out his hand and nodded.

"Anything for you, Bill!" he said.

They stood there alone in the silence; but as he brushed away the tears, Ranchester heard a heavy thump, and his cheeks went deathly pale.

"It's Hardigan," explained Dhue, "trying out his patent drop. He's going to—do the honors," he added.

"My God!" cried Ranchester. "Has it gone as far as that? Are they fixing the drop to hang you? They're not going to do it, Bill! I'm going back to the Governor. I'll offer him anything—everything—but he's got to grant that reprieve!"

"He won't do it," answered Dhue. "They're going to hang me, major. Would you mind—just being there, major?"

"I'll be there with a reprieve!" declared Ranchester. "Let me out of this! Hurry! Hurry!"

He hammered on the door. The guard passed him out, rushing off angrily, and never looking back once. As Bill Dhue



gazed after him, he smiled to himself and muttered an admiring oath.

"Dead game!" he said.

He paced to and fro, oblivious to the gallows knockings. For the moment he forgot the spite of Al Hardigan and the treachery and neglect of his friends. He was a soldier once more, and Ranchester was his commander, leading him on into the jaws of death.

There was a clang at the inner door, and an armed guard of militiamen marched in and stood at attention. Then the sheriff and his deputies walked into the gloomy cell room, followed closely by the crowd of invited guests. They filed across the room and stood huddled before the gallows, where Al Hardigan was still testing the drop.

Hardigan was stripped to his shirt sleeves. As he hurried up and down, his huge paunch trembled pendulously, but his step was firm and sure. As he glanced at the crowd, he nodded easily to chance acquaintances. There was almost a swagger as he bustled about, inspecting the hidden mechanism of his trap. When the reporters approached, he showed its workings in grim pantomime, for the jail was deathly still.

Beneath the floor of the platform he had arranged an automatic release, whereby the weight of the prisoner started a flow of water into a tank, which, when filled, suddenly dropped the trapdoors. Even at that hour, when the hardiest men turned pale, Al exhibited the mechanism like a plaything. With an instinctive repulsion, the reporters drew away from him, turning their eyes to Bill Dhue's death cell, before which a broad piece of canvas had been hung up, to cut off the gruesome sight of the scaffold.

As the spectators watched Hardigan at work, they sensed the venomous spite which lay behind his pretended industry; but if Bill Dhue noticed it he gave no sign. Hardigan owed him no mercy. On the Sunday of the jail break, Dhue had wrenched Al's pistol away from him and tried twice to shoot him down. But for the safety catch, Hardigan would be a dead man, and Bill Dhue would probably be free; but fate had decided against him, and the hand of God had reached down and punished him for his sins. Now, as the hour of his dissolution drew near, he picked up his Bible and prayed.

The clock on the courthouse tower clanged out the hour of eleven. There was a stir, and the sheriff nodded. The grim-faced officers and visiting sheriffs raised their eyes with one accord, and Bill Dhue stepped out of his cell. For a minute he stood looking, searching the crowd for one friendly face; and at that moment George Ranchester burst in. The major held his head up proudly, but his face was pale and drawn, and Dhue read his fate at a glance. Ranchester had failed, and he must die.

"All right, officer!" he said.

Walking down the narrow stairs, he mounted to the gallows platform. Behind him followed the sheriff, accompanied by Al Hardigan, who bore a red bag. Six men with cocked rifles stood near. Despite a thousand rumors, no rush was made to save the prisoner. He stood alone, looking at the gallows.

"Pretty good!" he said, nodding approvingly to Hardigan.

A sigh went up from the crowd. Bill Dhue's nerve was unshaken. He would die game.

"Mr. Dhue," began the sheriff, "if you've got any statement to make—"

He paused, and the crowd stood expectant. If Bill was really guilty, the time had come for him to confess the truth before he met his Maker.

As he scanned the grim faces that looked up into his, Dhue glanced at Ranchester and smiled.

"I did have a statement to make," he said. "I intended to tell all I know about certain things; but, boys, I've changed my mind. I'm trying to act like a Christian. I forgive all my enemies, and I want to thank my friends. That's all, Mr. Sheriff—go ahead!"

"Just a moment," spoke up Ranchester, as a murmur ran through the crowd. "May I speak to the prisoner, sheriff?"

The sheriff nodded, and the major strode up the stairs.

"Bill," he said, "I want to ask you a question. Did you confess to that preacher that you killed Eddie Yaples? The Denver papers say that you did."

"I did not," replied Dhue. "I confessed my sins, but I never killed Eddie Yaples."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Ranchester, and held out his hand. "Good-by, Bill," he said, and smiled.

They clasped hands in silence. Ran-

chester descended from the platform, while Dhue walked over to the trap.

"Do a good job, Al," the ranchman said, as Hardigan approached with his bag. "I'd do as much for you!"

"I believe it," rumbled Hardigan.

Opening up the bag, he fetched out his hangman's straps. While the crowd looked on in silence, he fastened Dhue's legs and strapped his arms behind his back, at the elbows. Then, with a swift reach above him, he brought down the hangman's noose and slipped it over Dhue's head. He drew the knot tight, and, at a signal from the sheriff, dropped the black cap over the prisoner's head.

"Are you ready, Bill?" he asked, backing off to survey his handiwork.

"Yes," replied Dhue calmly.

Hardigan stepped forward quickly, and, with the sheriff to help him, lifted the rigid form upon the trap. There was a click, followed by the sound of water running out of a tank, and Bill Dhue stood erect; but the

trapdoor did not drop. Al Hardigan, standing with folded arms, smiled and glanced at the crowd.

Like the trickle of a waterfall in a mountain stream, the water flowed on and on. An infinitude of time seemed to pass with every second, but still Bill Dhue stood firm and silent.

A murmur of alarm spread through the crowd. Hardigan's boasted release must have gone wrong; but still Al stood smiling, with his arms across his breast. He was waiting for Dhue's nerve to break.

Twenty seconds ticked by, and thirty, and forty. As the tank beneath the platform became fuller and fuller, the sound of the waterfall deepened. Every second was an agony, but Bill Dhue stood unmoved, as rigid as a man of iron. Then, at forty-nine seconds, the trapdoor gave way beneath him, and a sigh escaped from the crowd.

"He sure died game!" said the sheriff.

Hardigan answered with a shrug.

*(To be concluded in the November number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)*

### THE BIRD AND THE LOVER

SWEETHEART, there is a bird out there

Who makes it harder still for me  
This distance from your side to bear.

His song is like your loosened hair,  
And hath in its liquidity

So pure a thrill, I think that he  
Sings of your fair remembered face,  
That passed once through this leafy place—  
With that ecstatic note

Welling like tears from his small magic throat.  
Would I might learn from him the art  
Of such high music! When apart,

Then might I of my sorrow make  
A string of pearls that you might wear  
Upon your bosom for my sake;  
And you might tell them o'er, and pray  
A prayer for me thus far away,  
Making thereof a rosary,  
Till slow Time brought you back to me.

Meanwhile the bird sings on,  
Knowing too well, as I, that you are gone;  
And the moon rises through the wood,  
And seeks you in her silver hood;  
She looks into my lonely eyes,  
Then goes her way along the skies.

*Richard Le Gallienne*